

801 Xu Changqing's Shock

“You...” Hearing those words and seeing the other party's disdainful gaze, Xu Changqing's face turned livid in fury.

Even though the Martial Arts School was ranked sixth in the academy, standing behind the Physician School, it was still a huge power in Hongyuan City. On top of that, within the Ten Great Master Teachers, in terms of one-to-one combat, even if he wasn't ranked first, he was at least in the top three!

Yet, the other party didn't recognize him and even asked him for money?

And that wasn't the worst yet! The other party actually said that he was broke?

Broke your head!

How could someone dare to come to the Martial Arts School without even knowing who the school head is? Where did this freak come from?

Reining his anger back in, Xu Changqing said, “I am just here to take a look, not to listen to the lecture!”

As the head of the Martial Arts School, he must maintain a bearing worthy of such. He couldn't possibly fight with the other party over a mere insult.

“Take a look?” The plump man assessed him doubtfully.

Xu Changqing nodded as he stroked his beard, bringing out the disposition of an enlightened expert.

He had already made it so obvious. The other party couldn't possibly not recognize him after this.

“Alright then!”

The plump man seemed to have realized something, and he put the basket on the floor and said, “You may enter!”

“Thank you.” Seeing that the other party had finally realized his true identity, Xu Changqing nodded in satisfaction and

raised his leg to walk through the door. However, before he could step into the courtyard, he suddenly heard the quiet mutterings of the plump man.

“What the heck, why is he putting up such a front? If he has no money, he should just say so! Taking a look... he sure has some cheek to say such shameless words. Who doesn't know that he's going in to learn? Is there anyone more brazen than him? To think that a person like him could become a master teacher as well... The standard sure has dropped!”

The plump man's disdain for Xu Changqing couldn't be any more obvious from his words and tone.

“You...” Xu Changqing staggered, and he nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

He was the head of the Martial Arts School, one of the Ten Great Master Teachers! To be told that he was shameless to his face... Burning fury welled up within him, and he felt as if he was going to go insane.

He had never met anyone as infuriating as the plump man before.

Didn't you see the disposition of an expert that I displayed up just now? Shouldn't my identity be obvious after that?

“Fine! I'll pay!” Knowing that he would only be angered to death for arguing with such a fellow, and it would only drag down his reputation if he were to really squabble with him, Xu Changqing gritted his teeth and threw a spirit stone into the basket.

The spirit stone that just fell into the basket had a brilliant glow, and the overwhelming concentration of spiritual energy in it induced a disturbance in the spiritual energy in the surroundings.

“A high-tier spirit stone?” The plump man's eyes lit up.

He had thought that the other party was just another broke geezer trying to sneak into the lecture, but who could have known that he would whip out a high-tier spirit stone in the next instant... In the end, not only was that fellow not broke, he was even a wealthy man!

“I can go in now, right?” Xu Changqing harrumphed in displeasure.

“Wait, let me get your change. A high-tier spirit stone is worth around 10,000 middle-tier spirit stones, and the cost of the lesson is 200 middle-tier spirit stones. So, I’ll return... 9,800 middle-tier spirit stones to you!” the plump man said as his hands fumbled through the basket to take out spirit stones to return the change to the other party.

“There’s no need for it!” Xu Changqing waved his hands haughtily.

A high-tier spirit stone might be an invaluable treasure in the eyes of others, but as one of the Ten Great Master Teachers, a Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle expert, it was nothing much to him.

“Great! It just so happens that I don’t have the money to give the change to you too!” the plump man said with glowing eyes.

“...” Once again, Xu Changqing felt a stifled feeling in his chest.

What the heck was this...

How could a man be so shameless!

Why did Xue Zhenyang bring such a fellow here? Wasn’t this a clear disgrace to the Martial Arts School?

The more he thought about it, the more furious Xu Changqing felt. Suppressing his urge to slap the plump man to death, he entered the backyard. However, before he could get far, the plump man behind him shouted, “Look, the slightly aged student ahead has generously given us a tip of 9,800 middle-tier spirit stones. You should all learn from his example!”

Xu Changqing’s eyebrows twitched uncontrollably, and he nearly lost his sanity in that very instant.

Tip?

Learn from my example?

He was only intending to sneak here to see what was going on and teach Xue Zhenyang a harsh lesson. But somehow, he

ended up becoming yet another student coming here to listen to the lecture, and he even paid an additional tip for it...

The heck!

He wouldn't be able to cleanse his reputation now even if he were to jump into the Hongyuan Lake!

And as he had expected, the next moment, the students in the area turned their gazes to him.

"It's School Head Xu..."

"Not only did School Head Xu come, he even paid the school fee and gave such a huge tip to them?"

"Impressive! It looks like he acknowledges the formidable prowess of Zheng laoshi, Liu laoshi, and Wang laoshi as well!"

"Indeed..."

...

Seeing that even their school head had attended the lecture and paid a generous tip for it, a huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

Two of the students of the Martial Arts School rushed up to him and invited him to the front. "School head, you are here as well! The front seats are better, so why don't you come over here?"

Xu Changqing's body swayed weakly, and his vision darkened.

Front seats are better...

I am here to cause trouble, not to listen to the lecture!

"Indeed, school head. Our faction leader is currently waiting for you there, so why don't we head there together?" another student added.

"Faction leader? Fine, let's see what in the world is he up to!"

Xu Changqing felt so stifled that he could vomit blood.

However, it would only be more embarrassing if he were to remain there as a spectacle for the other students. Thus, he

decided to find his wretched disciple and teach him a lesson instead.

Squeezing through the crowd, they soon arrived at the front row before the podium.

“Teacher, you are here!” Upon seeing Xu Changqing, Xue Zhenyang immediately bowed respectfully.

“Just what in the world are you up to?” On the other hand, as soon as Xu Changqing caught sight of Xue Zhenyang, all of the fury that had been bubbling within him came bursting forth.

Instead of answering his teacher’s question, Xue Zhenyang pointed to the podium and said, “Teacher, calm down. Try listening to the lecture first...”

“Listen to the lecture?” As angry as Xu Changqing was, seeing at the entranced looks of the students in the area, he still decided to suppress his rage and turned his attention to the stage.

The one who was currently lecturing was a young lady only sixteen or seventeen years old. She had a beautiful face which was on par with even the school belles such as Hu Yaoyao and Dong Xin.

“... In essence, leg arts can be defined as the movement of one’s legs and feet. As we know, walking and running can also be considered leg and foot movements as well. If we can regard these casual movements as a means to cultivate our leg arts as well, we will surely be able to further refine our mastery of leg arts...”

“Most of leg arts that we cultivate is focused on technique. Take for example the Whirlwind Kick, Hanyang Kick, and Raging Adamantium Kick... There are simply far too many leg arts that I can list that can be classified under this category. However, this is a gross misinterpretation of the essence of leg arts. The core function of a leg is to move, so naturally, in order to bring out the true strength of a leg art, we should not focus merely on the technique of the kick but...”

The young lady spoke clearly and fluently, showing no hint of nervousness or her usual shyness at all.

Xu Changqing initially thought nothing of it, but the more he listened, the more shocked he became. Eventually, his face started to twitch in agitation.

One could recognize a true expert the moment they made a move.

As the head of the Martial Arts School, as well as a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, he possessed deep insight into the comprehension of battle techniques. Even though the other party only spoke about the basics of leg arts, her words precisely hit the nail on the head, guiding him directly to the core of leg arts.

In fact, her understanding on some aspects was even deeper than his!

It could be said that even if Xu Changqing were to take her place, he would be unable to do as well as her!

Is this... really just the foundation of leg arts? There are actually so many variations to the basics of leg art? After listening for a moment longer, Xu Changqing couldn't help but frown.

Unconventionality had become the new convention of martial arts. It was important to make one's battle techniques complex or unorthodox in order to catch one's opponent's off guard.

On the other hand, the young lady was speaking of the orthodox martial arts, leaving out all of the unorthodox variations and maneuvers that most cultivators would incorporate into their movements.

But for some reason, despite the simplicity of the moves she was explaining, it felt as if that was the best way to draw out the maximum prowess out of a leg art.

“... However, one issue with any leg art is the difficulty in putting one's full strength into a kick. Thus, I will be imparting a basic leg art to you that will allow you to gather the full strength of your body into your legs, allowing you to display

the full might of your cultivation toward your opponent...” the young lady on the podium explained.

“Most martial arts require one leg to support the body and another one to strike the opponent. Naturally, this results in one’s strength being divided between the two legs, thus reducing the strength of one’s kick significantly. However, if one could exert one’s full prowess into a kick...” As the notion struck Xu Changqing, his eyes lit up in excitement

He immediately pricked up his ears and listened intently. A moment later, he slapped his thigh and exclaimed, “Indeed! If one were to execute a leg art in such a manner, that would solve the issue perfectly! This enhances the might and the speed of the kick, making it far deadlier than before!

“As simple as the technique is, it embodies the essence of leg arts. This is a perfect demonstration of how all battle techniques are built upon foundations...”

Musing over the content of the young lady’s words, Xu Changqing’s heart leaped in excitement.

While the content covered by the other party might not be as profound as his, it was a perfect interpretation of the basics of leg arts. Even he would benefit greatly if he were to cultivate according to what the other party had said. At the same time, it also gave him a deep insight into the way to further his mastery of battle techniques.

“Teacher, what’s wrong?” Xue Zhenyang asked with a slight smile, seeing his teacher’s expression.

When he invited Zheng laoshi, Senior Aunt Wang, and Senior Uncle Liu over, he knew that his teacher would surely be enraged at his actions. Nevertheless, he still chose to do so because he had deep trust in their capabilities.

And he was right. In just a short moment, his teacher was also entranced by the lecture.

Honestly speaking, even though the three of them weren’t master teachers, their understanding of battle techniques far exceeded any master teacher’s he had met before. If they were to cultivate according to the methods they had proposed, they

would be able to build an impeccable foundation for their battle techniques, and that would in turn allow them to advance their mastery of battle techniques swiftly.

It was as if they were parting aside the clouds and showing them a whole new world above for them to reach for. How could anyone possibly not be taken in by that?

“Impressive!” Xu Changqing nodded. “I never expected that there would be a person who could have such a thorough and deep interpretation of the basics of battle techniques... To be able to listen to such a lecture for just two hundred middle-tier spirit stones, this is definitely a huge bargain!”

To master teachers like them, middle-tier spirit stones weren't anything much. Most seniors in the academy would have hundreds in their storage rings.

It was more than worthwhile to pay this small sum to listen to such an exciting lesson.

Through this lecture, many students would gain a refreshing insight into battle techniques, and the rise of the Martial Arts School wouldn't be too far away!

“Indeed!” Xue Zhenyang nodded in agreement.

If he wasn't deeply impressed by Zheng Yang's understanding of spearmanship, how could he, a top genius of the Master Teacher Academy, possibly be willing to take a person who was several decades younger than him as his teacher?

At that moment, Xu Changqing suddenly asked, “Zhenyang, what is the background of the young lady on the podium?”

“I'm not too sure about the details either. I happened to meet them while I was walking through the streets of Hongyuan City yesterday... Why? Is Teacher interested in taking her in as your direct disciple?” Xue Zhenyang asked.

“Taking her in as my direct disciple?” Xu Changqing sighed deeply and shook his head. “With her deep understanding of battle techniques, how am I qualified to be her teacher? What I intend to do is to invite her to become the Martial Art School's...

“... guest elder!”

802 I'm Not Selling It Anymore!

“Guest elder?” Xue Zhenyang widened his eyes in shock.

Even though guest elders might not wield as much authority as other elders in the academy, they had a higher standing than them.

This was because they were formidable figures outside who had been invited to join the academy in order to boost its prestige and reputation.

For example, the emperor of Hongyuan Empire also held the position of a guest elder in the academy. Occasionally, he would visit the academy to conduct a lesson or two for the students, imparting his comprehension of cultivation to them.

For a seventeen-year-old young lady to become a guest elder of the academy... Wasn't that a little too exaggerated?

“That's right. She is more than qualified for it!” Xu Changqing nodded seriously.

It wasn't on a whim that he had made this decision. He had already considered the various complications before saying it.

The other party was able to distill profound concepts into simple and direct explanations, provoking the listeners to think deeper into them.

If such figures could become the guest elders of the Martial Arts School, they would definitely be able to attract more and more students to join them, enhancing the prowess and influence of the school.

In time, it could overtake the Physician School, Beast Tamer School, and perhaps even the Apothecary School to become the number one school of the Master Teacher Academy!

The crux of a master teacher lay in clarifying doubts and imparting knowledge. In view of that, most of them paid little

regard to furthering their understanding of battle techniques. On top of that, advancing one's mastery of battle techniques took great effort, and it was highly dependent on aptitude as well. What made things even worse was that it wasn't a supporting occupation, making it a non-crucial aspect in raising one's master teacher rank...

As a result, despite being an impressive school that raised the fighting prowess of its students, there were very few who opted to join it, putting it in the bottom half of the ten schools, ranking above only the less popular supporting occupations such as the Celestial Designer School, Painter School, Demonic Tunist School, and Terpsichore School.

This was truly a disheartening sight.

All along, Xu Changqing had been dreaming of making the Martial Arts School bigger, and with an opportunity standing right before him, he would have to be a fool to not grasp it!

"Alright. I think it would still be best for Teacher to bring this issue up with them personally, so I will invite them to Teacher's room once Senior Wang's lecture ends," Xue Zhenyang said.

As he was the one who had invited Zheng laoshi, Senior Aunt Wang, and Senior Uncle Liu here, if the three of them could become guest elders of the school, it would reflect well on him as well.

With such backing in the academy, his standing would rise as a result as well. By then, wouldn't it just be a walk in the park for him to teach a freshman a lesson?

"Okay." Xu Changqing nodded before leaving the courtyard and walking to a room not too far away.

Sometime later, the door to the room opened, and Xue Zhenyang walked in with Wang Ying, Zheng Yang, and Liu Yang behind him.

"Zheng laoshi, Senior Aunt Wang, Senior Uncle Liu, this is my teacher, the head of the Martial Arts School, School Head Xu!"

“Teacher, this is Zheng Yang laoshi. I am currently studying spearmanship from him. This is Senior Aunt Wang Ying, you saw her on the podium just now. And this is Senior Uncle Liu Yang!” Xue Zhenyang hurriedly introduced them to one another.

“School head?” Zheng Yang and the others glanced at one another with widened eyes.

When they heard that someone was interested in meeting them, they were still wondering who it would be. They had never expected that it would be the head of the Martial Arts School.

“There’s no need to be alarmed. The reason I have invited you here is to offer you the positions of guest elders at our Martial Arts School,” Xu Changqing said with a kind smile.

“Guest elders?” Zheng Yang and the others were taken aback by those words.

They were still students learning under Zhang laoshi themselves, and yet in the blink of an eye, they were going to become guest elders of the great Master Teacher Academy? Were they dreaming?

Wasn’t this honor far too great for them?

“Yes!” Xu Changqing nodded. “May I know if you are willing to accept the offer?”

“Of course we are!” Zheng Yang and the others immediately nodded their heads in excitement.

“That’s good. I’ll make the application right now, and I should be able to give you your identity tokens by today afternoon at the latest!” Seeing that he had their approval, Xu Changqing nodded in satisfaction.

After chatting for a moment longer, Xu Changqing took his leave.

Soon, only Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and Liu Yang were left in the room.

The trio glanced at one another with a dazed look in their eyes, seemingly still unable to believe what had just happened.

A moment later, Wang Ying couldn't help but ask, "This... We became elders of the academy, but Zhang laoshi is still a student here... How are we going to report this matter to him?"

"This..." Zheng Yang and Liu Yang also scratched their heads in distress.

They had been so overwhelmed by excitement upon hearing the invitation that they accepted it immediately without considering the implications.

It was only after calming down that they realized the absurdity of the situation. For them to become elders of the academy when their teacher, Zhang Xuan, was still a student himself... No matter how one looked at it, the matter just seemed ridiculous.

"This... Why don't we hide it from him for the time being? We will just take each day as it comes..." Zheng Yang proposed after a moment of silence.

Escape is always the easiest solution in times of dilemma. Without any hesitation, Wang Ying and Liu Yang nodded. "Let's do that!"

It wasn't that they really wanted to hide it from Zhang Xuan, but... how were they supposed to bring up such a matter with him?

...

"What did you say? School Head Xu promoted those youngsters whom Xue Zhenyang brought over as guest elders?" Hearing the report, Dong Xin and Long Cangyue nearly fainted.

They had thought that School Head Xu would surely teach Xue Zhenyang a lesson, but who could have known that... he would actually make those youngsters into guest elders of the Martial Arts School!

How was that possible?

Was it a joke?

“It’s true! Not only that, I heard that School Head Xu went into seclusion as soon as he returned from the True Helios Faction, only appearing later in the night... According to the rumors, he gained new insight into battle techniques, and in a spar with Vice School Head Chen, he managed to defeat the latter in a single strike...” the student continued.

“Defeated Vice School Head Chen in a single strike?”

“Even though Vice School Head Chen’s strength wasn’t on par with School Head Xu, there wasn’t a large disparity between their fighting prowess. In the previous spars, it would take them several dozens of blows before the victor would emerge. Yet, a single blow...” Dong Xin’s eyes were filled in incredulity. “Are those youngsters whom Xue Zhenyang invited over really that formidable?”

“I’m not too sure, but I heard that everyone who attended the lecture has achieved a breakthrough of some kind, and the overall strength of the True Helios Faction has been raised significantly!” the student replied.

“I see...”

Long Cangyue and Dong Xin tightly clenched their fists. “It seems like we will have to be careful of the True Helios Faction!”

A similar scene was occurring in the other student factions across the academy as well, and even the teachers were alarmed by the matter.

For three youngsters who weren’t even twenty to become guest elders of the academy, this was unprecedented in the history of the Master Teacher Academy.

In an instant, the matter became a hot topic within the academy, and many freshmen also learned of the matter as well.

However, while most people in the academy learned about the new young guest elders in the Martial Arts School, very few knew the names of the guest elders or their background.

...

While a huge ruckus had broken out due to the three new guest elders, Zhang Xuan had also finally returned back to the academy.

The deadline which Vice School Head You set was two days. I should still be able to make it in time!

As soon as Zhang Xuan entered the academy, he didn't return to his residence in the Elite Sector but headed straight to the Tower of Physicians.

Even though Wei Ruyan's condition had stabilized after he had nourished her soul, the stable condition wouldn't last for too long. Treatment still had to be conducted as soon as possible or else her life would be at risk once again.

Zhang Xuan had already made a promise to the deceased Wei Changfeng... Regardless of what happened, he was determined to obtain the Ten-leafed Flower.

Soon, Zhang Xuan reached the Tower of Physicians. He headed straight for Vice School Head's residence and knocked on the door.

It was Sun Yuan who opened the door.

"You..." Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Sun Yuan was astonished.

He knew very well how dangerous the Cloudmist Ridge was. How could he possibly still be fine after heading to such a place?

"I am here to meet Vice School Head You!" Zhang Xuan said.

Considering that Vice School Head You intentionally ordered Wei Changfeng to pick the Cloudmist Flower despite knowing the dangers there, it was obvious that he had intended to pick on him.

As furious as Zhang Xuan was, for Wei Ruyan's sake, he decided to rein in his fury for the time being.

The Ten-leafed Flower was a rare saint herb that had the ability to heal one's soul. In the entire Hongyuan City, it was likely that Vice School Head You would be the only one who possessed it.

Wei Changfeng had already given up his life for it, Zhang Xuan couldn't let his perseverance and sacrifice go in vain.

Recovering from his daze after a moment, Sun Yuan nodded and gestured for Zhang Xuan to enter. "Please enter..."

Soon, he met Vice School Head You in his main hall.

"Vice School Head You, here is a Cloudmist Flower. As promised, I have brought it to you within two days!" Without even bothering with pleasantries, Zhang Xuan immediately flicked his wrist and took out a jade box containing the flower which Wei Changfeng had procured at the cost of his life.

"You obtained it?" Vice School Head was taken aback. He took the jade box over and opened it.

A mysterious mist rose from the jade box, and the flower within exuded a refreshing fragrance that left one's cells moaning in comfort.

Even without undergoing processing, the Cloudmist Flower was still an incredible plant with therapeutic effects.

"This is indeed the Cloudmist Flower!" Vice School Head You nodded.

"Since you have confirmed it, may I trade it for the Ten-leafed Flower now?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"I would have loved to do so, but that won't do!" Vice School Head You shook his head. "What I want is a living Cloudmist Flower which I can cultivate, but the one you have procured for me is already dead. You didn't fulfill my request, so how can I trade it for the Ten-leafed Flower? If you really want it, bring me a living Cloudmist Flower!"

"A living Cloudmist Flower?" Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

The other party didn't say anything of that sort when they made the deal two days ago!

Yet, at this instant, he was using this kind of excuse to reject it. It was clear that he had no intention of giving the Ten-leafed Flower to them in the first place!

“Fine, if a living Cloudmist Flower is what you want, a living Cloudmist Flower is what you will get...” Even though Zhang Xuan was furious, he knew that it would do him no good to fall out with You Xu right now.

He would have to hold himself back until he obtained the Ten-leafed Flower from the other party.

Thus, he took the jade box back from Vice School Head You’s hands and infused a surge of his Heaven’s Path zhenqi into the Cloudmist Flower.

At the same time, he secretly took out a droplet of Earth Vein Spirit Essence and dripped it on its stalk.

Even though it had been a day since the Cloudmist Flower had been harvested, it still managed to retain its freshness as it was stored in the jade box.

As long as Zhang Xuan could nourish it with his Heaven’s Path zhenqi and Earth Vein Spirit Essence, it should be possible for him to revive it.

As expected, under the nurturing of his zhenqi and the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, the slightly withered Ten-leafed Flower began to recover, and it started to exude an incredible fragrance.

“The Cloudmist Flower came back to life?” Sun Yuan was stunned.

Even Vice School Head You was dumbstruck by the scene before him as well.

In the very first place, he had no intentions of selling the Ten-leafed Flower at all. He only brought up the Cloudmist Flower as an excuse to deal with Wei Changfeng and Zhang Xuan.

He had thought that he would be able to force Zhang Xuan to back off by insisting that the Cloudmist Flower had to be alive, but in the blink of an eye, that fellow actually succeeded in doing so!

“Alright. Now that the Cloudmist Flower is alive, you should be able to trade the Ten-leafed Flower for it now, right?”

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan passed the jade box back to Vice School Head You.

“Not bad. Since the Cloudmist Flower is alive, I can trade it for the Ten-leafed Flower. However... my Ten-leafed Flower isn't mature yet, so I can't give it to you right now!”

Vice School Head You shook his head and said, “From the current look of it, it'll take around ten years for the Ten-leafed Flower to mature. So, I'm afraid that you will have to come back in ten years...”

“Ten years?”

Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed in fury. “At the very start, you said that you would trade the Ten-leafed Flower for a Cloudmist Flower as long as we brought one over within two days. When I brought one over, you suddenly insisted that it had to be alive. Now that I have revived it, you started saying that I'll have to wait ten years for it. What if you were to come up with some other excuse after ten years?”

“Are you doubting my integrity? Humph! Someone like you who has no respect for your elders wants to buy my Ten-leafed Flower?”

Vice School Head You's face darkened as he flung his sleeves. “Leave! I won't be selling my Ten-leafed Flower anymore!”

803 A Hundred Thousand Academic Credits?

“You won’t be selling your Ten-leafed Flower?” Hearing the other party’s words, Zhang Xuan’s face turned livid.

If not for this fellow, Wei Changfeng wouldn’t have died!

And despite all that had happened, he still refused to sell his Ten-leafed Flower?

Indeed! When a master teacher acted shameless, they could be even more fearsome than the saint beasts of Cloudmist Ridge!

“That’s right!” Vice School Head You waved his hands impatiently. “I don’t have the habit of selling immature herbs. Leave!”

Knowing that Wei Ruyan’s life was at stake, Zhang Xuan forcefully suppressed the rage bubbling within him and said, “In other words, the reason you are unwilling to sell the Ten-leafed Flower to me is because it isn’t mature yet. So, if it matures, you will sell it to me?”

“That’s right!” Vice School Head You nodded. “The medicinal properties of a herb will only be drawn out upon maturity, so as a physician, how can I sell an immature herb to another? I am not intentionally picking on you. As a master teacher, you should understand the logic behind this as well!”

“I see. Since you insist that you won’t sell an immature plant, I shall make it mature this very instant then!”

Glancing at the other party coldly, Zhang Xuan walked to the Ten-leafed Flower in the herb garden, dabbed a few droplets of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence on it, and infused his Heaven’s Path zhenqi into it afterward.

Even though the Earth Vein Spirit Essence could speed up the growth of the Ten-leafed Flower as well, it would still take a day before it matured. By pairing it with his Heaven’s

Path zhenqi, Zhang Xuan could further speed up the maturing process.

Indeed. With the Heaven's Path zhenqi and Earth Vein Spirit Essence infused to the Ten-leafed Flower, the saint herb began growing at a visible pace. Within ten minutes, ten beautiful flowers had bloomed on the ten leaves of the herb, and an invigorating fragrance drifted around it.

"This..." Sun Yuan widened his eyes in shock.

As a saint herb, the Ten-leafed Flower would ordinarily require at least ten years of cultivation before it could bloom. Yet, the other party succeeded in just ten minutes... Just how did he do it?

"Vice School Head You, since the Ten-leafed Flower has matured, you should be able to sell it now, right?" Zhang Xuan stood up and said.

At that instant, Vice School Head You's face was already completely livid.

When he said that the other party had to trade his Ten-leafed Flower for a Cloudmist Flower, the other party succeeded in bringing a Cloudmist Flower. When he said that the Cloudmist Flower had to be alive, the other party revived it. When he said that he couldn't sell it as the Ten-leafed Flower hadn't matured yet, the other party matured it on the spot... Was the other party actually there to slap his face?

Seeing the other party's grave expression, Zhang Xuan asked impassively, "What? Now that the Ten-leafed Flower has matured, is Vice School You thinking of another reason to reject me?"

"Humph! I brought this Ten-leafed Flower up painstakingly. If I insist on not selling it, will you snatch it from me?" Vice School You's eyebrows shot up.

"How could I dare to snatch the possession of a vice school head?" Zhang Xuan shook his head. With a sharp glint in his eyes, he stared at Vice School Head You Xu intently and said, "I will ask you one last time. Are you certain that you won't sell the Ten-leafed Flower to me?"

“That’s right! I would rather my Ten-leafed Flower rot in the herb garden than sell it to someone as disrespectful and unruly as you!” Vice School Head You harrumphed.

“Very well!”

Zhang Xuan turned around decisively and left the residence.

“He left just like that?”

Vice School Head You had thought that the other party would cause a ruckus over this issue, but he simply left without saying a word. Taking this entire scene into sight, Sun Yuan couldn’t help but say, “Teacher, it’s just a Ten-leafed Flower. Since he has already gone that far, why don’t you just sell it to him? There is really no need to make things so awkward...”

“Audacious! Are you trying to preach to me?” Vice School Head You Xu frowned in displeasure.

“I dare not!” Sun Yuan clasped his fist. “I heard that that fellow has caused quite a bit of trouble in the academy. I fear that... if we offend him, it might bring trouble upon us as well!”

“What a joke! I, You Xu, a Saint realm expert and the vice head of the Physician School, should fear him? After all the things I have gone through, do you think that I would fear a mere student?” Vice School Head You sneered coldly.

“But...” Sun Yuan was still worried.

There had to be something special about that fellow for him to win the favor of Pavilion Master Mo, School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and School Head Wei. If his teacher were to offend him, wouldn’t that mean falling out with the three school heads and the head of the Master Teacher Pavilion as well?

Vice School Head You harrumphed coldly. “No buts. If you’re truly worried, why don’t you follow that fellow then? If he dares to defame and spread malicious rumors about me before School Head Mo and the others, capture him immediately. I shall have him punished severely for slandering a higher ranked master teacher!”

“This...” Sun Yuan was a little hesitant.

“What are you waiting for? It is a huge sin for a lower ranked master teacher to comment blindly on the actions of a higher ranked master teacher. Since he’s a lower ranked master teacher, he should act like one! If he really dares to defame me before others, he’s simply courting death!” Vice School Head You waved his hands impatiently.

“Yes, Teacher!” Since his teacher had already said so, there was nothing else Sun Yuan could do. Nodding, Sun Yuan backed out of the residence.

It was indeed a crime for a lower ranked master teacher to gossip about the actions of a higher ranked master teacher without any concrete evidence. This was a rule in order to maintain order in the Master Teacher Pavilion. Considering that Zhang Xuan was only a 4-star master teacher whereas his teacher was a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, Zhang Xuan could indeed be taken away if he dared to defame his teacher.

After leaving the residence, Sun Yuan looked around and found the back silhouette of Zhang shi a short distance away. Discreetly, he followed behind the other party.

Even though he didn’t approve of his teacher’s way of dealing with this matter, he dared not defy his teacher’s orders.

Will he find School Head Mo first or School Head Zhao? Sun Yuan thought as he followed Zhang Xuan from a distance away.

He had heard quite a few rumors regarding Zhang Xuan over the past few days. School Head Zhao, School Head Mo, and School Head Wei all gave him preferential treatment. If Zhang Xuan intended to deal with his teacher, it was likely that he would seek one of them to back him.

However, given the esteemed standing of those three and the fact that they weren’t from the school, the most that they would do was serve as mediators for this conflict. In order to maintain harmony in the academy, it was unlikely that they would do anything to his teacher.

I think it is more likely for him to find School Head Zhao. After all, the Blacksmith School is the second largest school in the academy, so School Head Zhao is in a better position to exert pressure on my teacher... Sun Yuan deduced.

To his surprise, however, he suddenly saw the young man walking straight through the entrance of the Tower of Physicians.

Hmm? Why is he going to the Tower of Physicians? Sun Yuan blinked blankly in astonishment.

Shouldn't the young man be running to the other schools to complain to the school heads and have them stand up for him? Why did he head to the Tower of Physicians instead?

I should follow him to take a look! Sun Yuan hurriedly followed him.

There was a huge crowd travelling into and out of the Tower of Physicians. Shortly after Zhang Xuan walked in, he disappeared amidst the sea of people. Sun Yuan searched the surroundings for some time but to no avail. Left with no choice, he headed right to the front reception.

It was a young lady who was manning the reception. Upon seeing Sun Yuan, she clasped her fist and bowed.

“Sun laoshi...”

It was the same lady who had led Zhang Xuan to Vice School Head You's residence that day.

“Hello. Have you seen Zhang Xuan around here?” Sun Yuan asked.

“Zhang Xuan?” The receptionist was slightly taken aback by the question.

“It's the young man whom you brought to meet Vice School Head You that day!” Sun Yuan frowned.

“H-he... is Zhang Xuan?” The receptionist covered her mouth in shock, and her eyes twinkled with excitement, as if having seen her idol.

Over the past few days, there was probably not a single person in the academy who hadn't heard of the name 'Zhang Xuan'.

Seeing the excited look on the other party's face, Sun Yuan was rendered speechless. He coughed loudly to regain the other party's attention before asking, "Cough! So, did you see him?"

What the heck is wrong with this?

As a senior, do you really need to be admire a freshman like that?

Even if you do, the least you can do is not to express it so clearly in public!

"I did. He took an application form from me, saying that he intends to challenge the Wall of Dilemma to earn some Academic Credits!" the receptionist replied.

"He intends to earn some Academic Credits at the Wall of Dilemma?" Sun Yuan was stunned for a moment before shaking his head with a sigh.

The Wall of Dilemma was also known as the Wall of Incurable Illnesses, and it could be found in every Physician Guild.

Usually, difficult illnesses encountered which no existing physicians in a certain guild were able to treat would be listed on the wall so as to encourage the later generations to muse over the problem and solve it with their own capability. However, it was not without reason that these illnesses were known as 'incurable'.

The success rate of the challengers was extremely slim, and only a handful of physicians in history had succeeded in resolving even one illness on the Wall of Dilemma.

In a sense, this was similar to the Blacksmith School's Passageway of Records. There might be many people challenging it each year, but how many of them succeeded in beating the existing record?

"That's right!" the receptionist replied.

I thought that he would head straight to the Blacksmith School to look up School Head Zhao. Who would have thought that he would challenge the Wall of Dilemma instead... What is he up to?

Just as Sun Yuan was plagued with doubts, a buzz so loud that it caused even the ground to tremor echoed throughout the Tower of Physicians.

“What is going on?”

As the center of the Physician School, the Tower of Physicians was built with the most resilient materials. Unless something major had happened, a building this stable couldn't possibly shake.

“Hurry up, let's go and take a look. The Wall of Dilemma has collapsed!”

“The Wall of Dilemma collapsed? But isn't it just a communication tool with the Physician Guild headquarters? How did it collapse?”

“I heard that someone has just challenged the Wall of Dilemma, and within ten minutes, he managed to solve all of the illnesses listed on it. Due to the sheer speed he solved the problems at, the Wall of Dilemma was unable to catch up and eventually collapsed...”

“Unable to catch up?”

“Indeed! Information transfer over long distance is a very energy-consuming process. The Wall of Dilemma uses high-tier spirit stones in order to process the information written on our side and transfer it over to the headquarter. Yet, I heard that the current challenger solved several hundred illnesses written on the wall within ten minutes... Every single one of the illnesses written on the Wall of Dilemma is complex and requires a thorough treatment method. As a result, the sheer amount of information the Wall of Dilemma had to process resulted in a burden exceeding its limit, thus eventually causing its collapse...”

...

Just as Sun Yuan was perplexed by the situation before him, he heard discussions ahead of him, and the crowd abruptly began rushing toward the Wall of Dilemma to watch the commotion.

He solved the problems so quickly that the Wall of Dilemma was unable to handle it and collapsed? Sun Yuan widened his

eyes, unable to believe what he had just heard.

Was that even possible?

He had attempted the problems on the Wall of Dilemma before, and every single one of them was exceedingly difficult. Even if his teacher was here today, he would find it hard to solve even a single problem without pondering over it for several days. How could there exist a person who could solve all of the questions within ten minutes?

Could that person be... Zhang Xuan?

Suddenly, Sun Yuan recalled the words of the receptionist and subconsciously turned his gaze over, only to see the latter with widened eyes.

“Is there anyone else who challenged the Wall of Dilemma today?” Sun Yuan hurriedly asked.

“No. He’s the only one...” the receptionist replied with a dazed look in her eyes, as if she couldn’t believe what had just happened either.

“Is it really him?” Sun Yuan muttered under his breath as he felt his heart turning cold in apprehension. Unable to hold himself back, he instructed, “Take me over to have a look!”

Thus, the duo rushed over to the Wall of Dilemma, only to see the huge room being reduced to shambles, and smoke was currently puffing out of it.

A middle-aged man climbed out from the ruins with a face caked with dust.

Sun Yuan hurriedly walked up to ask, “Hu shi, what happened?”

Hu shi was also Vice School Head You Xu’s student, as well as Sun Yuan’s junior. He was in charge of looking after the Wall of Dilemma.

“It’s Zhang Xuan. He came here and solved all of the problems on the Wall of Dilemma... Due to accumulating too many Academic Credits, the system exceeded its limit, resulting in the entire room’s collapse!” Hu shi explained with quivering lips.

“Accumulated too many Academic Credits?” Sun Yuan was taken aback.

“Indeed. It’s not like you don’t know the situation with the Wall of Dilemma. In order to encourage students to challenge it, it’s set in a manner such that the more questions one solves in a given period of time, the more Academic Credits one will be awarded. If a person solved a question in two hours, they would earn one Academic Credits. If a person solved two questions, they would earn two Academic Credits for the second question, thus earning a total of three Academic Credits. Going by this pattern, a person who solves three questions will earn six Academic Credits, so on and so forth...” Hu shi explained.

Sun Yuan nodded.

There was indeed such a rule for the Wall of Dilemma.

The faster one solved the problems, the more Academic Credits one would earn. This system was implemented to challenge the analytical ability of students. After all, it was common for a physician to be overloaded with patients, so it was imperative for physicians to be able to formulate a treatment method using minimal time as well so that they could treat more patients.

“That Zhang Xuan managed to solve more than five hundred questions within five minutes... As a result, the Academic Credits he earned were far more than the number the entire Physician School possessed at the moment. On top of that, the system was also overclocked, thus resulting in the current state of affairs...” Hu shi explained.

“He earned more Academic Credits than the entire Physician School possesses?” Hearing those words, Sun Yuan felt his vision turning dark, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

“Are you saying that... he actually earned more than 100,000 Academic Credits?”

804 Sun Yuan's Mental Breakdown

As Academic Credits were the currency of the academy, their distribution had to be regulated to avoid inflation. Thus, every ten years, the ten schools would be given a set number of Academic Credits to distribute to the students.

The amount was determined by many factors, such as the total number of students in the school, the number of occupation promotions in recent years, the accomplishments of its students...

As the fifth largest school in the academy, judging from recent history, the Physician School would usually be given at least a hundred thousand Academic Credits to distribute for the following ten years.

As students spent their Academic Credits on using the services of the Physician School, such as accessing the library or purchasing valuable herbs in the school, the Physician School would earn back the Academic Credits, forming a mini economy in itself.

Given that Zhang Xuan could cause the Wall of Dilemma to be unable to process the distribution of Academic Credits, resulting in a severe error that caused its collapse... That could only mean to say that the Academic Credits he had earned exceeded a hundred thousand!

That was the entire budget the Physician School had to live off for the next ten years!

And yet, it was gone in an instant...

If there aren't enough Academic Credits for the teachers to distribute to the students as rewards for the missions and tasks... Darn it, the Physician School is in deep trouble... Realizing the implications of Zhang Xuan's actions, Sun

Yuan's mouth twitched violently, and he nearly burst into tears.

His teacher, You Xu, happened to be in charge of regulating the distribution of Academic Credits in the Physician School. For ten years' worth of Academic Credits to be earned by a single individual... This meant that they had no more Academic Credits to award to the other students!

Earning Academic Credits was no easy task. Students had to undergo laborious tasks or life-threatening missions just to earn a couple of them. If they were to realize that they would be awarded nothing at the end of their efforts...

At this moment, Sun Yuan could already see the huge pandemonium that would arise due to the displeased students!

Furthermore, the distribution of the Academic Credits was a major affair concerning the development of the students. If the Physician School was unable to compensate its students properly for their efforts, that would be flouting the rules of the academy as well. As the vice school head in charge of its regulation, his teacher would surely be severely punished!

Sun Yuan had thought that the fellow would rush to the Blacksmith School to complain to School Head Zhao, but who knew that just by challenging a Wall of Dilemma, he had already managed to corner his teacher!

Without a doubt, students would start withdrawing from the Physician School due to this matter, and its overall prowess would fall rapidly. Perhaps, by the end of this decade, they might very well be the last place among the ten schools.

And for allowing such an incident to happen under his watch, his teacher would indubitably be stripped of his responsibilities.

"Indeed!" Having realized this much as well, Hu shi also had a bitter smile on his face.

"Right, where is Zhang Xuan? Why isn't he here?"

At this moment, Sun Yuan suddenly realized that the culprit of this mess had disappeared, so he couldn't help but ask.

“Zhang Xuan? After clearing the Wall of Dilemma, he headed straight for the Malady Platform...” Hu shi said.

Realizing that it was possible that Zhang Xuan wasn't quite done yet, Sun Yuan's body trembled in apprehension at what that could potentially happen next. Fearfully, he asked, “Malady Platform? What is he going to do there?”

“The Malady Platform has a unique mechanism that allows physicians to experience illnesses themselves so that they could better understand its symptoms, and they can also treat themselves so as to verify the effectiveness of their proposed treatment method... If he is heading there, I guess he should be trying to assess his current proficiency in the Way of Medicine,” Hu shi replied.

The Malady Platform allowed a physician to put themselves in the shoes of the patients to better understand what they would be going through, thus building compassion within them for those who were suffering. At the same time, through verifying their treatment methods here, they could avoid mistreating their patients.

“Since he was able to overcome even the Wall of Dilemma, does he really need to verify his proficiency in the Way of Medicine?” Sun Yuan rolled his eyes.

The Wall of Dilemma was already the most difficult test in the entire Physician School. Given that Zhang Xuan was able to solve over five hundred illnesses within five minutes, would he still need to verify his proficiency in the Way of Medicine at the Malady Platform?

“This... Crap!” At this moment, Hu shi also realized what was going on.

Just as he was about to rush over with Sun Yuan, a loud rumbling suddenly echoed from afar, and smoke could be seen rising in the distance. It seemed something else had collapsed too.

Sun Yuan's mouth twitched uncontrollably. “That's where the Malady Platform is! Let's hurry over to take a look...”

With Hu shi and a few others, they hurriedly rushed to the Malady Platform, and the sight before them upon reaching it left them staggering weakly.

At this moment, the massive building housing the Malady Platform was reduced to ruins, and a middle-aged man was looking at the rubble with a dazed look.

“Zhou shi, what happened?” Sun Yuan hurried forward to ask.

Zhou shi was also a direct disciple of Vice School Head You Xu, Sun Yuan’s junior. He was in charge of maintaining the Malady Platform.

“A student said that he wanted to verify a new treatment method he had, so I allowed him to enter after paying the required Academic Credits. Who knew that... within three minutes of his entry, this would happen...” Zhou shi’s face was pale, and his lips were quivering in agitation.

Knowing that this wasn’t the time to be concerned about the collapse of the Malady Platform, Sun Yuan asked anxiously, “What is the freshman called... and where is he now?”

“I believe his name is Zhang Xuan, and from the direction in which he was heading... I think he’s going to the ‘Ancestor Forest’!” Zhou shi replied.

“Ancestor Forest?” Sun Yuan was taken aback. “The Ancestor Forest is a place where the will of the predecessors lingers alongside their tombstones. Engraved on their tombs are the most outstanding feats they achieved in their lives and how they had achieved them. It serves as an inspiration to the later generation to learn from their example and their wisdom. Why would Zhang Xuan head there...”

If the Wall of Dilemma and Malady Platform were premises to verify one’s expertise as a physician and earn Academic Credits, the Ancestor Forest would be a place to admire and worship the predecessors.

All renowned physicians of the Master Teacher Academy would have a tombstone erected for them there. The illnesses which they had discovered a cure for, along with the cure

itself, would be inscribed on their tombstones alongside their name so that the later generations could admire their work...

It was nothing more than a platform to motivate the current students, and there was not a single Academic Credit that could be earned there. Why would Zhang Xuan head there?

“I think we should still go over to take a look,” Hu shi said.

“Yes!” Sun Yuan nodded in agreement.

Even though they couldn't see how Zhang Xuan could break anything in the Ancestor Forest—the Ancestor Forest had absolutely nothing to do with tests or Academic Credits—there was simply something so extraordinary about him that it would be unwise to gauge him via common sense. It was still best for them to take a look themselves.

As such, they rushed off to the Ancestor Forest, but as usual, before they could reach their destination, the ground shook intensely, and the sound of countless tombstones shattering sounded.

The violent shaking caused even cracks to appear on the ground, and even the resilient Tower of Physicians was shaking violently.

“What happened?” Rushing into the Ancestor Forest, they realized that the entire area had been reduced to rubble. Sun Yuan and the others felt as if they were going insane.

This was a place to honor the glorious deeds of their predecessors! How could it be destroyed as well?

Did Zhang Xuan... destroy them with his own hands?

The reason the Wall of Dilemma and Malady Platform collapsed was due to Zhang Xuan's overwhelming capability exceeding the limits of the mechanism, resulting in its own collapse. Considering that the destruction occurred due to the limitations of the Physician School's facilities, it would be unreasonable to lay blame on him. After all, he hadn't flouted any rules at all; all he did was challenge that which should be challenged.

But for the Ancestor Forest... there was no examination involved here, so there shouldn't be any mechanism for him to overwhelm. Could he have created the ruins here with his own hands?

To intentionally destroy the property of the Physician School, not to mention disrespecting the predecessors and their heritage, that was a grave sin that could have Zhang Xuan sent straight to the Tribunal of Master Teachers to be judged!

“This... How could this be?”

At this instant, a middle-aged man with a ghastly pale face walked over with a stupefied expression on his face. It was as if he had just suffered a blow so great that he was losing his mind.

“Ye shi...” Sun Yuan shouted.

Ye shi was also his junior, and he was in charge of maintaining the Ancestor Forest.

As the Tower of Physicians was under Vice School Head You's jurisdiction, the facilities in the area were mainly taken care of by his students.

Seeing that Sun shi, Hu shi, and the others were standing before him, Ye shi finally snapped out from his daze. Gesturing to the rubble behind him, he exclaimed with a defeated look, “Wrong! To think that they are all wrong!”

“Ye shi, what happened? Did someone destroy the Ancestor Forest using brute force?” Sun Yuan asked.

“Brute force?” Ye shi shook his head and sighed deeply. “Take a look yourself...”

Without explaining, Ye shi took out a Record Crystal and tossed it over to Sun Yuan and the others.

Catching it, Sun Yuan hurriedly infused his zhenqi into the Record Crystal to activate it.

With a flash of light, a completely unharmed Ancestor Forest suddenly appeared before their eyes. Following which, a young man walked into the scene.

Who else could the young man be if not Zhang Xuan!

Zhang Xuan swiftly walked up to the first tombstone.

The tombstone contained the writings of the first head of the Physician School. Inscribed on the tombstone were the contributions he had made to humanity in his lifetime, the most significant one being formulating a cure for the Demonhound Affliction.

The Demonhound Affliction was a bizarre disease that was rampant in that period of time. Those who were bitten by a hound-type beast would begin shedding their skin and growing fur within three months. A few days after the transformation began, they would lose their rationality and turn into monsters that would bite anyone they saw. Those who were bitten by the infected would be inflicted with the Demonhound Affliction as well.

What made things worse was that the disease was so potent that not even Saint realm experts could suppress the symptoms.

Due to its nature, the disease spread swiftly, causing great calamity to the human race. The first head of the Physician School, through half a year of tireless research, finally managed to formulate a vaccine against the Demonhound Affliction.

However, the vaccine was only effective for prevention; it couldn't save those who had already been transformed. In order to suppress the plague, the academy had to dispatch countless experts to slay those who had been infected and cremate their corpses, resulting in a huge death toll.

Even though the first head of the Physician School failed to save those who had already been infected, he played a major role in suppressing the plague, saving many innocent lives through doing so. He was honored for his contribution in that calamity, and his story was passed down from generation to generation.

Just as Sun Yuan and the others were perplexed by what Zhang Xuan was going to do, they saw the latter glance at the

tombstone briefly before speaking.

“The Demonhound Affliction is a disease caused by the virus present in the blood of hound-type beasts. It can be easily cured by taking two qian[1] of Sunflower Hemp, four qian of Crimson Frond, half a liang of Violetdawn Stalk, and a pinch of a hound-type beast’s heart flesh! A disease that can be cured so easily, and yet you had all of the afflicted killed and cremated. On top of that, the vaccine you came up with is at least dozens of times more expensive than mine as well. I really don’t understand how you can feel proud of your achievements and have a tomb erected here. Are you that intent on having the later generations learn of your shameful failure?”

Kacha!

Hearing those words, the will contained within the tombstone realized that there was indeed a far better medicine to the one he had formulated back then, and he had wronged those who were killed in the plague. The tombstone began to shake violently before abruptly bursting into smithereens.

Without sparing the first tombstone a second glance, Zhang Xuan walked on to the second tombstone, and just like before, he took a glance and spoke a few words, and the will contained within felt ashamed of its deeds too and broke apart.

The same scene occurred again and again as he walked down the path.

From the moment he glanced at the tombstone to the moment he spoke, there was only an interval of two breaths. But despite that, each time he spoke, a tombstone would surely burst apart.

In other words... the prescription that he had proposed was even more advanced, effective, and easier to concoct than the ones the predecessors had come up with!

“In a battle in the Way of Medicine against the predecessors, he was able to display such overwhelming knowledge that left the latter ashamed of themselves, to the point that they would willingly erase all traces of themselves...”

The mouths of Sun Yuan, Hu shi, and the others twitched at the sight before them.

They finally understood why Ye shi would look so defeated!

Guarding the Ancestor Forest, he had been studying their wisdom day after day, and he was filled with awe and respect for them. But a man suddenly walked in and said that everything was wrong, and he even won the acknowledgement of the predecessors at that... It was extremely fortunate that his mind didn't break immediately!

Wall of Dilemma, Malady Platform, and the Ancestor Forest... Three of the most important facilities of the Tower of Physicians have been destroyed. Just what kind of monster did Teacher offend?

Taking another glance at the ruins of previously majestic lands, Sun Yuan shook his head and sighed deeply.

To point out the mistakes in the predecessors' deeds and induce the erasure of the flawed solutions on the tombstone, preventing them from misleading future generations, not only did Zhang Xuan not err, he had even contributed greatly to the Physician Guild!

If the Physician Guild were to learn of this matter, they would surely reward him handsomely for it...

But still, to be able to come up with even more brilliant solutions to difficult diseases that took the predecessors months or even years to formulate... Just how did that fellow do it?

“Wait, where is Zhang Xuan?”

After a moment of shock, Sun Yuan suddenly realized that he still hadn't found Zhang Xuan, and he quickly looked around to find him.

“Sun laoshi, bad news! Zhang shi has headed to the higher floors of the Tower of Physicians. He intends to take the physician examination...”

All of a sudden, a student running toward them shouted frantically. However, before he could finish his words, the

ground shook yet again.

Following which, the massive tower in the distance abruptly collapsed, and countless rock fragments rained down on the earth.

“The Tower of Physicians... is gone as well!” Sun Yuan cried.

[1] 1 qian is around 5 grams, 1 liang is around 50 grams. Note that these numbers do vary from dynasty to dynasty, and I am taking the interpretation from XianDai HanYu CiDian or Modern Chinese Dictionary.

805 Life-and-Death Physician Duel

The Tower of Physicians consisted of seven floors in total.

The first floor was mainly used for miscellaneous matters, such as patient diagnosis, the Wall of Dilemma, sales of medicinal herbs, and such.

From the second floor onward were the mechanisms for the 1-star to 6-star physician examination.

Just like the Ocean of Weapons, mechanisms and formations were incorporated into the Tower of Physicians to create a simulation for the examinees. As such, not only would they have to possess deep understanding in the Way of Medicine, they must be experienced in treating patients as well.

Treating an illness was unlike smithing or pill forging. A single illness could easily have thousands of different methods to cure it. One had to assess the patient's constitution and overall condition before choosing the most suitable one.

As such, the examination in the Tower of Physicians couldn't be as routine as the one in the Ocean of Weapons. Thus, the wills of countless predecessors had been left within the Tower of Physicians to assess the proficiency of the examinees.

The wills of the predecessors wouldn't have much trouble conducting examinations for others, but when it came to Zhang Xuan...

Zhang Xuan was able to even criticize the 'correct answers' left behind by the predecessors in the Ancestor Forest to such a degree that they seemed completely worthless... If he were to come up with far better solutions than those of the predecessors in the Tower of Physicians, they would surely feel ashamed of their own ignorance and think that they were unworthy of assess the work of others...

Thus... just like what happened in the Ancestor Forest, the Tower of Physicians ended up collapsing as well!

It had been millenniums since the Physician School first came into existence, and yet, the crystallization of countless predecessors' wisdom over all those years couldn't even compare with that fellow...

It was no wonder School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and even the reserved School Head Wei would regard with him respect and give him their personal tokens... That fellow was a complete monster!

Sun Yuan and the others hurriedly drove their zhenqi to form a barrier to protect themselves from the flying rubble thrown out from the collapsing building.

At this point, Sun Yuan and his juniors were feeling their hearts bleed within.

Vice School Head You was in charge of the affairs concerning the Tower of Physicians. For Zhang Xuan to have destroyed the entire place while abiding by the rules... this meant that all responsibility for the damage would have to be shouldered by their teacher alone!

Wasn't it just a mere Ten-leafed Flower...

To think that single darned flower would cause the doom of the Physician School!

This wasn't just a matter of the destruction of facilities and the reparation cost, but the reputation of the Physician School as well!

For a freshman to literally destroy the four most prized assets of the Physician School with his knowledge, and on top of that, not a single one lasted more than ten minutes...

Furthermore, all of the Academic Credits had been swiped by him, leaving the Physician School currently deep in debt with the pending payments for the missions and tasks undertaken by students... Without a doubt, it wouldn't be long before the students began abandoning the Physician School, and by the next year, it would fall to the very bottom in the rankings, beneath even the Terpsichore School!

Just what the heck was this!

No, I must inform Teacher of the matter immediately! Just as Sun Yuan was feeling deep desolation within, he suddenly recalled his teacher.

When he left, his teacher was still gleeful about teaching a freshman a lesson, not realizing the calamity he had just brought upon the Physician School.

Thus, he immediately rushed from the ruins to Vice School Head You's small residence.

Stepping through the doors, he saw Vice School Head You watering the plants leisurely, oblivious to the mess that had happened outside.

In order to retain a dense concentration of spiritual energy within the herb garden, a formidable formation had been set up in the courtyard. But while spiritual energy was unable to escape, sound was unable to enter as well.

Despite the huge commotion outside, isolated from the rest of the world, the herb garden remained unaffected.

Seeing that it was Sun Yuan, You Xu raised his gaze and glanced at him. "You are back. How is it? Did you capture that fellow?"

Sun Yuan's lips twitched. "I didn't..."

"You didn't? Did he not go to School Head Zhao or the others to complain? You know the rules as well, defaming a higher ranked master teacher warrants the death penalty," You Xu sneered coldly.

"He didn't find the other school heads to complain. Instead, he went to the Tower of Physicians..." Seeing that his teacher was still immersed in his world, Sun Yuan wasn't too sure how he could break the news to him.

"He went to the Tower of Physicians? For what?" You Xu was perplexed.

Not knowing where to start, Sun Yuan said, "Teacher, I think it might be better if you head outside to see for yourself..."

“See for myself?” You Xu was growing more and more intrigued by the baffling words his student was spouting. Nevertheless, seeing the grim expression on his student’s face, he nodded and left his residence.

As soon as he stepped out of the door, a sight of ruins appeared before his eyes. The towering Tower of Physicians from before was nowhere to be seen.

“This rubble... is the Tower of Physicians? What happened? Was there an enemy attack?” The huge contrast between what he expected to see and what he saw left You Xu on the verge of insanity.

That was the Tower of Physicians, the trademark building of the Physician School! For it to collapse all of a sudden... Who was the culprit?

Could it be the Otherworldly Demons?

“No, it is...”

But just as Sun Yuan was about to speak, a resounding voice echoed throughout the entire Physician School. “I, Zhang Xuan, request the physician headquarters’ permission for a ‘Life-and-Death Physician Duel’ against 6-star physician, Vice School Head You Xu. I beseech your approval!”

Hong long!

The next moment, a physician emblem flew into the air, and with a brilliant flash of light, a massive word appeared in the sky—Permitted!

Life-and-Death Physician Duel? Sun Yuan’s vision darkened.

The Life-and-Death Physician Duel was a platform for physicians to resolve irreconcilable grudges between them through a duel, somewhat similar to how the Master Teacher Confrontation worked.

As long as the headquarters gave its permission, both parties would be able to decide on a type of duel to resolve their grudges.

So, the reason he took the 6-star physician examination is for this! Realization suddenly struck Sun Yuan.

Typically speaking, the headquarters would only approve of a Life-and-Death Physician Duel between physicians of similar rank. Thus, Zhang Xuan decided to get his 6-star physician emblem first.

However, entering the higher levels of the Tower of Physicians to take the physician examination required Academic Credits, which Zhang Xuan lacked as a freshman... That was why he went for the Wall of Dilemma first!

In other words... Zhang Xuan was intending to challenge his teacher in a battle of their medicinal knowledge and force him to his death!

This duel was indeed the most straightforward and official way to destroy another physician in public!

It was no wonder that fellow specially asked his teacher one last time before leaving. It seemed like he was indeed giving his teacher one last chance. However... it was a pity that his teacher thought little of the other party's threat, thinking that it was impossible for a mere student to do anything to him...

But now, not only did the other party destroy the Tower of Physicians, he was even challenging his teacher to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel... What should they do now?

“Life-and-Death Duel? How conceited can you get! But that works fine by me too, I have been wanting to teach you a lesson as well! Since you are the one who came at me, don't blame me for getting nasty!”

Vice School Head You hadn't expected a freshman to dare challenge him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, and his face immediately darkened upon hearing those words. Flicking his wrist, he took out his physician emblem. Following which, he bit his finger and dripped a droplet of blood on the emblem.

Hula!

With a glimmer of light, the emblem flew into an air, and an authoritative voice boomed, “I, You Xu, agree to the duel!”

“Teacher...” Not expecting his teacher to accept the duel without any hesitation, Sun Yuan's body shook weakly.

Too overwhelmed with shock, he hadn't had time to explain to his teacher the various unbelievable feats that Zhang Xuan had accomplished before his teacher suddenly accepted the duel in his moment of delay.

This was truly a disaster!

Just like the Master Teacher Confrontation, the Life-and-Death Physician Duel was overlooked by the headquarters. Once accepted, any party that backed out would be severely punished. Some had been stripped of their physician licenses due to this matter, and there were even a few who were killed outright!

If it had been before, he would have surely thought that the freshman who dared to challenge his teacher was a fool seeking death... But after all he had seen, his instincts were telling him that even if his teacher went up against that fellow for ten thousand rounds, it was unlikely that he would win even a single round!

Or to put it in other words... his teacher stood no chance at all!

Nevertheless, as Vice School Head You's student, it was still his duty to warn him of the matter so that he could be prepared. "Teacher, you shouldn't have agreed to the duel. That Zhang Xuan isn't as simple as he looks..."

"What's wrong?"

Seeing how little faith his student had in him, You Xu's face darkened, and he harrumphed coldly. "He's just an insignificant fellow, there's nothing to fear. I shall make him learn the price of daring to stand against me! You should return to the residence first and heat up some fine wine for me. I should be done by the time it's warmed up..."

Then, ignoring Sun Yuan, he leaped into the sky, in the direction his emblem had flown to.

In his view, no matter how talented Zhang Xuan might be, he was only a twenty-year-old brat. On the other hand, he had been immersed in the study of the Way of Medicine his entire life. To challenge him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, what else could that be other than committing suicide?

“Heat up some fine wine? Teacher...” Sun Yuan nearly burst into tears.

Indeed, there is someone who will be destroyed in a few moments, but... that will be you and not Zhang Xuan!

Sun Yuan hurriedly shouted for his teacher, only to realize that the latter was too far to hear him.

“No, I have to inform him of this matter before it’s too late...” Sun Yuan said determinedly.

If his teacher were to let his guard down in the duel on top of everything else, there truly would be no hope at victory whatsoever. Thus, Sun Yuan swiftly pursued his teacher.

...

In the head of the Physician School Zhong Dingchun’s residence, School Head Mo clasped his fist and asked, “School Head Zhong, do you have any news regarding Senior Byzantium Helios Beast?”

In response to the question, Zhong Dingchun shook his head.

Zhong Dingchun was a tall old man with a black beard. Despite being the head of the Physician School, he was dressed in exceptionally simple clothing, giving others the impression that he was an ordinary old man.

“I have tried following all of the clues we have, and I have paid a personal visit to Leiyuan Peak as well. However, I am still unable to find anything significant yet,” School Head Zhong said worriedly.

As soon as he had learned that the Byzantium Helios Beast had been captured by the Otherworldly Demons, he had immediately begun his investigation. However, despite seven days’ effort, he was still unable to find anything at all. At this point, he was starting to feel a little anxious inside.

The longer it took them to find the Byzantium Helios Beast’s whereabouts, the slimmer the chances that he would be alive.

Were they going to lose the old principal’s tamed beast too, shortly after losing the old principal?

“I haven’t been able to find anything either. I had the students of the Beast Tamer School ride their aerial beasts to search the surroundings, but there was no sign of the Otherworldly Demons or Senior Byzantium Helios at all. It’s as if they’ve disappeared into thin air!” School Head Mo shook his head and sighed deeply.

He felt extremely helpless and frustrated by this issue.

It was by his invitation that Senior Byzantium Helios went to the Leiyuan Peak to invigilate the students’ exam. But who could have known that he would disappear in the midst of the examination?

If it wasn’t for him, Senior Byzantium Helios would have never gone missing... As such, School Head Mo had always blamed himself for this matter.

“Alright, let’s not talk about this anymore... The best we can do now is wish Senior Byzantium Helios good luck!” School Head Zhong shook his head before turning to School Head Mo once again and asked, “I heard that you are very interested in the freshman named Zhang Xuan from the newest batch, and you intend to take him in as your direct disciple?”

“There’s indeed such a matter, but... I fear that I don’t have the fortune to do so!” School Head Mo replied with a bitter smile.

“You don’t have the fortune to do so?” Zhong Dingchun was perplexed. “Just what kind of talent does that fellow have for you to say such words?”

“His affairs are truly incredible. You will understand once you hear his story...”

Stroking his beard, School Head Mo was just about to tell the latter Zhang Shi’s formidable deeds when the ground suddenly shook intensely. In the next moment, a deafening rumbling sounded in the distance.

Following which, they saw the towering Tower of Physicians, which stood at the very center of the Physician School, collapse abruptly.

“What happened?” Narrowing his eyes, School Head Zhong hurriedly rushed out of his residence and headed right for the Physician School. However, before he could get far, he heard an impassive voice echoing resoundingly in the surroundings.

“I, Zhang Xuan, request the physician headquarters for a ‘Life-and-Death Physician Duel’ against 6-star physician, Vice School Head You Xu. I beseech your approval!”

806 Movements from All Fronts

“Zhang Xuan? Life-and-Death Physician Duel?”

Lu Feng and School Head Mo glanced at one another, and their eyes slowly widened in shock.

It was just a moment ago that they had begun talking about the other party when such a situation occurred... Just what in the world had happened?

Wasn't that fellow a skilled beast tamer and a blacksmith?

When did he become a physician as well? Not to mention, he was going to challenge You Xu?

“Something big is going to happen. Let's head over to take a look!” Anxious, School Head Mo hurriedly left with Lu Feng, headed in the direction of the tower of Physicians.

...

“What did you say? Zhang Xuan... is going to challenge Vice School Head You to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel? Is he insane?” Long Cangyue widened his eyes in shock, unable to believe what he had just heard.

“Isn't that fellow a blacksmith and a terpsichore? When did he become a physician too?” Dong Xin was also astonished by the news.

“Challenging Vice School Head You, a Saint realm expert...” Long Cangyue's lips quivered in fear at that thought.

As powerful as his Ashen Moon Faction was in the academy, that was only relative to those small confrontations amongst the student populace. Yet, that fellow actually went head-to-head with a vice school head of the academy, challenging him to a Life-and-Death Duel...

Was he tired of living?

“It was just yesterday that the True Helios Faction caused a huge uproar in the academy, and this fellow managed to top that... Let’s go over to take a look!” Dong Xin said with a bitter smile.

They had thought that it was insane for the True Helios Faction to bring in three youngsters to lecture them, but that fellow had to be completely out of his mind to go head-to-head against a vice school head...

Was he trying to start a revolution?!

“Yes!” Not daring to waste a single second, the duo rushed out of the residence.

...

“Teacher... challenged Vice School Head You Xu? What happened?”

In Zhang Xuan’s residence in the Elite Sector, Luo Qiqi was still pacing around the room, worried for her teacher’s safety after he went to the Cloudmist Ridge, when she suddenly received the news from Hu Yaoyao, and her body trembled in shock.

That was sheer arrogance!

The opponent was a vice school head and a 6-star pinnacle physician... To challenge such an opponent to a Life-and-Death Duel given his current strength...

Wasn’t that just madness?

“No, I must stop him...” Unable to remain seated, Luo Qiqi leaped up and rushed for the Physician School.

...

The light fragrance of flowers drifted in a tranquil and vast courtyard in the Master Teacher Academy.

A beautiful figure stood amidst a field of flowers with her hands behind her back. That image felt so peaceful that it seemed as if it could have been a painting.

Her silky, black hair fell on her snowy robe as if long streaks of ink, and the vibrant colors of the flowers in the

surroundings seemed to complement her disposition, creating an inexplicably bewitching sight.

“He is challenging the 6-star pinnacle physician, You Xu?”

The figure turned around, revealing her alluring face.

It was the young lady who had captured Zhang Xuan’s heart, Luo Ruoxin.

Back then, after learning that Zhang Xuan was fine, she had returned back to her residence, and the two of them hadn’t met each other since. Who would have thought that the next time she heard of his name would be when he challenged a vice school head to a duel?

“He sure is gutsy...” Luo Ruoxin’s lips curled up into a faint smile.

Even though she hadn’t spent much time with Zhang Xuan, she did know that he had a daring side to him.

Back then, with just a cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 4-dan, he stepped into an encirclement of Consonant Spirit realm spirit beasts to save her. Such a feat in itself took extraordinary courage.

“For him to go to the extent of challenging You Xu to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, it seems the latter must have committed some kind of intolerable crime...”

Based on her impression of Zhang Xuan so far, he didn’t seem like a person who would get angry over minor matters. For him to go to this extent, it seemed that You Xu must have done something deplorable.

“I should go and take a look, too!” With a slight smile, she stepped forward lightly, and in a blink of an eye, she had already disappeared from the courtyard.

...

In the True Helios Faction, Zheng Yang and the others were currently sitting at a table filled with sumptuous dishes, enjoying the highest of privileges.

“Uncle Qiang, Teacher has challenged a vice school head to a duel...”

But despite the delicacies before her, Wang Ying was so worried that she couldn't find the appetite to eat.

“It's just a duel, no worries. Don't you have confidence in your teacher's prowess? That vice school head will be utterly destroyed by the time we are done with this feast, so you can rest assured!” Sun Qiang said as he stuffed another large piece of spirit beast meat into his mouth.

“But...”

“There are no buts, eat. Nothing can possibly happen to your teacher...” Sun Qiang waved his hands casually. “Besides, there's nothing you can do even if you head there too. Do you know anything about the Way of Medicine at all?”

“This...”

A bitter look appeared on Zheng Yang and the others' faces.

Unable to share their teacher's burden, they couldn't help but feel helpless at that instant.

“Enough, there's no need to feel conflicted over this matter. Just eat your food! Your teacher might look docile usually, but once he makes a move, there's never been a single occasion where he has not succeeded before. If you're still worried, we'll head there once we are done eating!” Sun Qiang said while stuffing himself with more food.

You must be joking! If it is a matter which even the young master is unable to resolve, there is nothing we will be able to do there either.

Not to mention... is it even possible for there to be something which the young master and the old master are unable to resolve in this world?

“Alright then...” Seeing how calm Sun Qiang was, and recalling the various incredible deeds that their teachers had done, Zheng Yang and the others slowly lifted their chopsticks and began to dig in.

...

“Hahaha, he’s truly courting death! Vice School Head You’s mastery in the Way of Medicine is beneath only that of School Head Zhong Dingchun, making him one of the top physicians of Hongyuan Empire. To challenge him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel... he must be tired of living!”

“Seems like there will be a good show ahead!”

“That freshman has allowed fame to get to his head; he has started to forget his place. To dare to provoke even the vice school head, just how arrogant can a person get...”

...

As Zhang Xuan’s resounding voice reached the corners of the Master Teacher Academy, a huge uproar followed.

Some were shocked, some were agitated, but most were waiting to watch him make a fool of himself.

Establishing the Xuanxuan Faction amidst the oppression of the other student factions, causing a huge commotion in the Blacksmith School, winning the favor of three school heads... Zhang Xuan had been in the spotlight ever since he had entered the academy. While there were some who admired his capability, there were naturally also a few who were unsatisfied with him.

There were many seniors who were waiting for him to fall off his high horse.

Thus, upon hearing that he had challenged the vice school head of the Physician School, they immediately rushed over to watch him lose the competition.

...

On a platform not too far away from the ruins of what used to be the Tower of Physicians, Zhang Xuan stood proudly with a cold gleam in his eyes.

It was not without a reason that he caused such a huge commotion with his challenge. His motive was simple—deterrence!

He simply didn’t have the time or effort to deal with everyone who came his way.

Each occupation had its own way to resolve conflicts amongst its members. The Life-and-Death Physician Duel was the official way for physicians to deal with irreconcilable grudges amongst themselves.

It was one thing for You Xu to refuse to sell the Ten-leafed Flower, but he had intentionally misled Wei Changfeng to cause his death. There was no way Zhang Xuan could forgive him!

Given Zhang Xuan's previous rank, the Physician Guild would never acknowledge his request for a Life-and-Death Physician Duel with You Xu. Understanding that much, he could only obtain a 6-star emblem first.

Just as Sun Yuan had deduced, the reason he went to challenge the Wall of Dilemma was to earn the Academic Credits.

Despite possessing the favor of three of the school heads, Zhang Xuan didn't have a single Academic Credit on him. Naturally, he wasn't able to enter the Tower of Physicians.

"Zhang shi, how did you end up challenging Vice School Head You to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel?"

At that moment, a figure suddenly appeared right in front of Zhang Xuan. It was the head of the Blacksmith School, Zhao Bingxu.

He had rushed over as soon as he received the news, so he arrived even earlier than School Head Mo.

"What happened? Do you need me to mediate in the conflict between you two? It's not that I don't trust you, but Vice School Head You's proficiency in the Way of Medicine is astounding. If not for his advanced age, he would have surely become one of the Ten Great Master Teachers instead of Zhong Dingchun in the previous selection!"

Zhao Bingxu quickly sent a telepathic message to Zhang Xuan, hoping that he would rescind his reckless decision.

He truly admired Zhang Xuan's capability, and he was unwilling to see anything happen to such a talented genius.

It was not without reason that it was called the Life-and-Death Physician Duel. Just the slightest carelessness could potentially result in one's death!

Knowing that the other party was saying those words out of concern, Zhang Xuan replied respectfully, "I am grateful for your goodwill, but I know what I am doing. Allow me to resolve this matter myself."

So what if You Xu is a vice school head? So what if he is a talented physician?

I will still crush him to a pulp!

"Alright then... However, you must be extremely careful! Vice School Head You once went to an ancient domain together with the old principal and a few others, but he ended up being the only one who managed to return alive, whereas the others went missing, and he was extremely self-reproachful about that.

"Perhaps it was due to the heavy blow of the matter, but his temper has become extremely eccentric since then. I fear that he might attempt to kill you in the duel... If you find yourself in danger, it'd be best for you to admit defeat straight away. Don't worry, Mo Zhu and I will step forward to help you mediate the matter," Zhao Bingxu advised Zhang Xuan through zhenqi telepathy.

Back then, when the old principal discovered an ancient domain, he had taken a team with him to explore the grounds. However, all of them had gone missing in the expedition, and You Xu was the only one who had returned alive.

After that incident, his temperament abruptly changed. He began isolating himself in his residence, choosing to avoid contact with everyone else as much as he could.

Despite being the head of the Blacksmith School, Zhao Bingxu had no confidence that his words would hold any sway over You Xu.

"Un!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

After saying what he had to say, Zhao Bingxu heaved a sigh of relief and leaped down the platform.

This was a duel conducted with the approval of the Physician Guild headquarters. Not even he, as a 6-star pinnacle master teacher and one of the Ten Great Master Teachers, could reverse that decision.

Hu hu hu!

Soon, School Head Mo, School Head Zhong, and the others arrived as well.

“What happened for Zhang shi to become so angry as to recklessly challenge You Xu to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel?” Wei Ranxue asked anxiously.

“I am not too sure about the details either, but my men are currently looking into it!” Zhao Bingxu replied.

“Looking into it?”

“One of my students happen to be a close friend of You Xu’s direct disciple. He should be reporting back soon,” Zhao Bingxu replied with a nod.

The Master Teacher Academy might be big, but as the school heads, they still had some connections throughout the academy. It shouldn’t be too difficult for them to look into a matter.

“Teacher!”

A short moment later, a middle-aged man suddenly ran up to the group.

“Un. What have you found out?” Zhao Bingxu asked.

“According to my friend, it seems that Zhang shi, together with Wei Changfeng of the Spirit Emporium, paid a visit to Vice School Head You, hoping to purchase a Ten-leafed Flower from him to save a person. However, Vice School Head You demanded a Cloudmist Flower as payment,” the middle-aged man said.

“Cloudmist Flower? He was trying to make them scale the Cloudmist Ridge?” Upon hearing those words, a frown appeared on School Head Mo’s forehead, and his face darkened.

“Un! So, this morning, Zhang shi brought back a Cloudmist Flower, but Vice School Head You adamantly refused to make the trade... Infuriated, Zhang shi went to take the 6-star physician examination and challenged him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel!”

The middle-aged man swiftly revealed the news that he had heard.

Considering how huge this matter had become, it would be impossible for them to cover up the matter anymore. Thus, Sun Yuan didn't bother hiding anything from the middle-aged man.

“To refuse to make the trade after they obtained the Cloudmist Flower, You Xu is intentionally making things hard for them!” Zhao Bingxu frowned deeply in disapproval.

“Indeed. There are many Saint realm beasts in the Cloudmist Ridge, such that even I wouldn't dare to enter too deep myself. They must have paid a heavy price in order to procure the Cloudmist Flower! And yet, You Xu still refused to make the trade. It's no wonder Zhang shi flew into a rage! Even if I was in his place, I doubt that I would have been able to hold back my temper either!” School Head Mo exclaimed furiously.

Master teachers must honor their words! If we can't even keep a promise we have made, what right do we have to preach to others?

Breaking one's promise was one of the greatest taboos that a master teacher could make.

“But regardless of whether You Xu has done it intentionally or not, it is still too reckless of Zhang shi to challenge him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel... Can he win against him?” Wei Ranxue frowned in worry.

807 You Xu's Eyes Reddened

“This...” School Head Mo and School Head Zhao fell silent.

They had seen the young man's talent in beast taming and smithing, but in the Way of Medicine...

One must know that treating a patient was an extremely complex study. Due to differences in constitution and cultivation technique, each patient's condition was unique. Even if two people were suffering from the same ailment, the medicine that was effective on one might not necessarily be effective on the other.

In order to make the correct judgements for a treatment, knowledge was not enough. One needed vast amounts of experience as well.

As such, most physicians chose to roam the world and even frequent battlefields. Only by expanding their horizon and encountering more patients would they make progress in the Way of Medicine.

As such, the older a physician was, the more skilled they were likely to be.

Even if Zhang shi possessed superb talent, he was only twenty this year. Could he really be a match for the experienced You Xu who had lived for nearly a thousand years?

“I think so... I asked him, and he seems really confident,” Zhao Bingxu replied.

Despite his positive words, his tone carried slight traces of hesitation.

So far, he had only seen the other party's aptitude in smithing. As for treating a patient... never before. Without anything to work with, it would be hard for him to make an accurate deduction.

“Please be assured, Zhang shi will surely emerge victorious!” Seeing the conflicted and worried expressions of the trio, the

middle-aged man who had just reported the matter to them spoke up.

“Zhang shi will surely emerge victorious?” The four school heads turned to look at the middle-aged man doubtfully.

Zhang Xuan was going to face one of the top physicians of Hongyuan Empire, how could that fellow be so confident of the outcome?

“It seems like you are still unaware,” the middle-aged man said.

“You should have heard of the Three Great Trials of the Physician School, right?”

“The Three Great Trials? Do you mean the Malady Platform, Wall of Dilemma, and Tower of Physicians?” School Head Mo replied.

Those three infrastructures formed the basis of the Physician School, so even the other school heads had heard of them as well.

“Zhang shi... In the first ten minutes, he tore down the Wall of Dilemma. In the next five minutes, he left the Malady Platform crumbling. While strolling through the Ancestor Forest to return to the Tower of Physicians, he induced the shattering of all the tombstones erected there... After which, in less than ten minutes, he managed to clear the 4-star to 6-star physician examinations, leaving the wills of the predecessors in the Tower of Physicians feeling defeated, thus resulting in the collapse of the Tower of Physicians as well,” the middle-aged man said with a bitter smile on his face.

“The current state that the Physician School is in was caused singlehandedly by him... How could a person who possesses such astounding medical skills possibly lose?”

“T-this...” School Head Zhao and the others widened their eyes in shock.

When they arrived at the Physician School, they had also been perplexed to see the mess it was in. To think that the culprit behind this would be that fellow as well!

Tearing down the Wall of Dilemma, crumbling the Malady Platform, destroying the Ancestor Forest, and demolishing the Tower of Physicians... Just how formidable must one's medical skills be to be able to achieve all of these feats?

Unbelievable!

Standing beside School Head Mo, the head of the Physician School, Zhong Dingchun, who had remained silent all this while, staggered weakly upon hearing those words, and muttered in disbelief, "All of this happened... just because You Xu was unwilling to sell a medicinal herb to Zhang shi?"

The middle-aged man nodded. "From the current news we have, that seems to be the case!"

"You Xu, screw your grandmother..." Zhong Dingchun nearly spurted a mouthful of blood out of sheer frustration.

Freaking hell! Do you think that it was easy for the Physician School to come this far? Yet, you caused such a mess just by offending a single person. How do you expect me to face the preceding heads of the Physician School?

With this, I will become the most disgraceful school head in the entire history of the Master Teacher Academy...

During my administration, a student actually managed to cause such devastating damage to the Physician School, and through legitimate means at that... The heck, just what have I done so wrong to deserve this?

I was doing nothing in my residence when this came out of nowhere. You Xu, are you sure you aren't a spy sent by others to do me in?

Zhong Dingchun gnashed his teeth furiously. "After this, I will make sure to strip him of his position as the vice head and make him grind himself to dust reconstructing the Tower of Physicians... No, that won't quell my anger. I will make him clean every single toilet in the Physician School..."

The other vice school heads helped their own school by bringing in top-notch talents and maintaining order, but this fellow... not only did he break his promise, he even set such a talent thoroughly against the Physician School...

What will others think of the Physician School when they learn of it?

Just why in the world did I appoint this darned thing as the vice head of the Physician School...

“My condolences!”

Seeing the frenzied state that School Head Zhong was in, School Head Mo and the others shook their heads and sighed deeply.

Of all people You Xu could have offended, he just had to pick on the most monstrous student the Master Teacher Academy had ever had since its inception.

It was fortunate that the other party had only torn down the Tower of Physicians before challenging You Xu to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel. If he had headed to the other facilities as well... this day might just have been the final day of the Physician School!

At this point, Wei Ranxue couldn't help but heave a long sigh of relief. Thank god that the examination for our Terpsichore School is much easier... Otherwise, who knows what could have happened to our Terpsichore School!

While attempting to take the blacksmith examination, Zhang Xuan had destroyed half of the Blacksmith Guild along with the entire Passageway of Corridors. It was even worse for his physician examination—the Physician School lost its Wall of Dilemma, Malady Platform, Ancestor Forest, and Tower of Physicians, and it seemed that a vice school head was still waiting to get onto that list...

It was truly fortunate that she had made the wise call to apply for the 6-star terpsichore emblem for Zhang Xuan directly. Otherwise, her small Terpsichore School couldn't possibly have survived the Zhang Xuan Ordeal.

Hearing those words, School Head Mo's eyebrows immediately began twitching. “Then... should I apply for a 6-star beast tamer emblem for him, too? What if he suddenly thinks of taking the examination in a few days' time?”

“...” The middle-aged man.

“...” The other three school heads.

...

Meanwhile, amidst a huge gust of wind, Vice School Head You Xu landed on the platform.

Placing his hands behind his back, he gazed at Zhang Xuan menacingly with narrowed eyes. Carrying a domineering aura as if the entire world was in his grasp, he sneered coldly, “With your measly capabilities, you dare challenge me? I won’t bully you. I will let you choose what kind of duel we shall have!”

A duel between physicians could be mainly classified into two categories—quantity and quality!

In a duel of quantity, the physicians would be gauged based on the number of patients they could treat to a satisfactory degree within a set period of time, conventionally two hours. On the other hand, in a duel of quality, the physicians would be tasked to come up with a prescription for the same patient, and they would be judged on how easy it was to concoct the prescription, its price, and the effectiveness of it.

“As expected of Vice School Head You, he sure is magnanimous!”

“Of course! As a 6-star pinnacle physician, it’s a piece of cake for him to deal with a freshman...”

“You’re my idol, Vice School Head You!”

Under normal circumstances, the challenged person in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel would have the right to select the format of the duel, and yet, Vice School Head You decisively gave away this advantage to Zhang Xuan. His magnanimous actions immediately won him the applause and admiration of many amidst the crowd.

Did you see that?

That is the magnanimity that a master teacher should have!

For a freshman who has barely learned peanuts about the Way of Medicine to be so arrogant as to challenge a veteran such as

Vice School Head You... Even if he's given you the advantage of choosing, can you win?

"There is no doubt; that fellow Zhang Xuan will surely lose. Just because he has achieved that little bit here and there, he forgot his own place. Today, Vice School Head You will beat him back to where he belongs!"

"I heard that he established a new student faction called the Xuanxuan Faction or something a few days ago. Those freshmen sure are brazen to attempt to overthrow the long-established hierarchy right after their enrollment. As their ringleader, he must be punished sternly as a warning to others..."

Upon hearing that Zhang Xuan was so brazen as to challenge a vice head of the Physician School, many of the seniors couldn't help but gloat gleefully.

This is the Master Teacher Academy, not whatever rundown village you come from. Instead of lying low obediently, you chose to go around causing trouble. Now, you shall suffer the consequences of your actions!

Hearing the discussions below, You Xu felt a surge of confidence, and he mocked Zhang Xuan coldly. "Why? You are the one who challenged me. Are you scared speechless now that I am standing before you?"

Seeing You Xu's majestic disposition, another round of cheers broke out beneath the stage.

In stark contrast to the delighted cheers of the crowd was Sun Yuan, who was on the verge of bursting into tears after rushing over to the platform as fast as he could and seeing what he saw.

His teacher was currently overloaded with confidence, but if his teacher had seen what he had seen just a moment ago, he wouldn't be acting in such a manner...

Not daring to waste a single moment, Sun Yuan hurriedly sent a telepathic message over.

"Teacher, I have a matter that I must inform you of right now!"

“Right now? Can’t you see that I’m busy?” You Xu’s eyebrows shot up in displeasure.

His student, Sun Yuan, might be a talented physician, but wasn’t he way too lacking in his sense of timing? Couldn’t Sun Yuan see that he was busy over here?

“This matter is really urgent, so I can’t put it off. Otherwise, I fear that teacher might be disadvantaged in the duel!” Despite seeing his teacher’s livid expression, Sun Yuan knew how important this matter was, so he pushed on.

“Disadvantaged?” You Xu frowned.

“Yes. Zhang Shi, just a few moments ago, managed to clear the 6-star physician examination!” Fearing that his teacher would lose his patience, he hurriedly got straight to the point.

“He cleared the 6-star physician examination despite his lacking cultivation as a freshman? It seems like he does possess some true capability...” You Xu was stunned for an instant before nodding slightly.

It was no wonder the other party had won the favor of School Head Zhao and the others. He was indeed a talented individual.

But, so what?

The other party was a freshman who had only recently cleared the 6-star physician examination. On the other hand, he was a veteran who had immersed himself in the Way of Medicine of nearly a thousand years. Did he need to fear an inexperienced brat?

“Not only so, he went to the Wall of Dilemma... and singlehandedly, he solved all of the problems on it!” Sun Yuan continued.

“Wall of Dilemma? Is that even within the means of a new 6-star physician? Let me guess, he went back without even solving a single problem, right...”

You Xu was in the middle of his sentence when the meaning of Sun Yuan’s words suddenly struck him, and he froze. “What did you just say? H-h-h-h-he solved all of the problems on it?”

“Yes, and that’s not all...” Sun Yuan swiftly went through what he had encountered previously.

“The Malady Platform collapsed?”

“The tombstones in the Ancestor Forest shattered out of sheer embarrassment?”

“While clearing the 6-star physician examination, he left the lingering will of the predecessors ashamed of their ignorance, thus inducing the collapse of the Tower of Physicians?”

“So, he is the culprit of the mess I see before me...”

Every single matter that Sun Yuan spoke about was like a bolt of lightning striking You Xu. In that instant, he felt as if someone had thrown him down an abyss that was thousands and thousands of zhang[1] deep, and it was just a matter of time before he went splat.

Putting everything aside, he couldn’t even solve a single question on the Wall of Dilemma. Yet, the other party actually solved more than five hundred of them in a single breath...

Was that even humanly possible?

I am facing such a monster in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel?

You must be pulling my leg, right?

You Xu had thought that the other party was just a mere chick which he could squash with one hand tied behind his back. Yet, he realized that his judgement had failed him, and the other party was actually a majestic dragon of the heavens, an existence who could destroy his world with a breath!

“That’s right... I fear that the odds are against Teacher in this duel!” Sun Yuan said worriedly.

You Xu’s body swayed weakly, and it looked as if he would collapse at any moment.

How in the world is this ‘the odds are against me’? More like I don’t even have a single odd in my favor at all!

If he were to really compete with the other party, it would definitely be his head that rolled.

If only he'd known that this would happen, he would have never agreed to it.

"Why didn't you say so earlier..." You Xu couldn't help but berate in fury.

If only Sun Yuan had told him this earlier... What was the point of telling him this now that he had agreed to the duel? His acceptance had already reached the Physician Guild headquarters; it was too late to back out now.

"Didn't Teacher tell me to warm up some fine wine to wait for your return," Sun Yuan replied indignantly.

It wasn't that I didn't want to speak, but you didn't give me a chance to do so!

You Xu's mouth twitched. "Warm up some fine wine..."

As the memories regarding everything that had happened earlier flashed through his mind, You Xu couldn't help but feel extremely stifled inside.

I only refused to sell you a Ten-leafed Flower, did you need to leave the Physician Guild in such a state?

To challenge me to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel on top of everything else...

Even if I win this duel by some chance, I will still be skinned alive by the school head!

Just what the heck is this!

Looks like I have reaped what I have sowed. As bitter as the fruit may be, I have no choice but to swallow it...

In that instant, You Xu felt his eyes reddening.

[1] 10 chi, or 3.58 meters (11 feet 9 inches)

808 Content of the Duel

But as stifled as he was, as an old monster who had lived for nearly a thousand years, he swiftly recovered and began thinking of a solution to his current plight.

Since he was able to clear the Wall of Dilemma, it is unlikely that he would stumble on difficult illnesses!

Since he was able to overcome the Malady Platform, it means that he has a deep understanding of the newest illnesses!

Since he was able to make the predecessors' wills voluntarily destroy their own tombstones out of shame, it means that his understanding of the Way of Medicine has reached an incredible level...

...

The more You Xu pondered the matter, the more awful his complexion became.

No matter how he looked at the matter, he couldn't see himself winning at all.

Unless... Suddenly, a thought struck You Xi's mind, and a vicious glint flashed in the depths of his eyes.

Alright, it's decided then!

Just as he made his decision, Zhang Xuan suddenly raised his gaze and said, "Since Vice School Head You is so generous as to offer me the opportunity to decide on the format of the duel, I will graciously take you up on the offer. The duel format I propose is..."

"Hold it right there!" a voice abruptly interjected.

Without regard for all of the words he had said before, You Xu raised his hand and said, "Since you are the one who challenged me, naturally, I should be the one deciding the format of the duel!"

I would have to be a fool to allow you to decide the duel format!

“Is this the magnanimity that you all spoke about?” Zhang Xuan muttered with a wry smile.

Upon hearing those words, the students who had still been cheering in support for You Xu a moment ago abruptly fell silent. They felt a stinging pain on their cheeks, as if they had been sharply slapped on their faces.

Just a moment after they praised the other party for his magnanimity, the other party reneged on his words.

As a 6-star master teacher, can't you at least have a sense of shame and honor your words?

“Fine, speak then!” Zhang Xuan replied coldly.

It mattered not to him what the other party chose. There was only one thing he was here for, and that was to avenge Wei Changfeng! He would achieve this regardless of whatever stood in his path.

“Good. As physicians, in order to save the lives of our patients, we have to be skilled in all aspects.”

Vice School Head You gazed at Zhang Xuan with a sharp glint in his eyes as he continued, “Naturally, this includes curing poison as well. This is an essential skill that all physicians must learn. The duel format I propose is very simple. Do you dare to participate in a Duel of Poison Curing with me?”

“Duel of Poison Curing?” Zhang Xuan raised his eyebrows.

Even though it wasn't as varied as the master teachers', a duel between physicians could come in many forms as well, and poison curing happened to be one of them.

Poison masters and physicians were nemeses of one another. If one wanted to progress further as a physician and earn the respect of others, one had to be skilled in the Art of Poison Curing. Otherwise, it would truly be shameful if a high-ranking member of the Physician Guild were to succumb to a secret attack by the poison masters.

Throughout history, there were simply far too many cases of physicians being poisoned to death.

“That’s right. Not only must a physician be good at treating illnesses, he must also be capable of curing poison as well. Without comprehensive knowledge in all aspects of medicine, one cannot be considered a full-fledged physician!”

“So, do you dare to take me on in a Duel of Poison Curing?” You Xu asked with a smirk on his face.

“Preposterous! That damned fellow!”

School Head Zhong Dingchun was already incensed when he saw You Xu suddenly reneging on his words. However, upon seeing the latter proposing a Duel of Poison Curing, he couldn’t hold himself back any longer and cursed furiously.

“What’s wrong?” School Head Mo asked.

“Poison curing is an extremely dangerous duel format. The lives of those involved will be put at risk!” Zhong Dingchun said.

“Put at risk? What do you mean by that?” School Head Zhao and the others were perplexed.

They had heard of the Duel of Poison Curing before, but as it was a less common form of dueling among physicians, they weren’t too sure about the rules.

“In order to test a cure for a poison, we will need someone who is afflicted with the poison. In other words... a person must be afflicted with the poison to carry out this duel!” Zhong Dingchun said.

“A person must be afflicted with the poison?”

Since it was a duel, it was natural that an extremely potent poison would be used. It would still be fine if the physicians managed to cure the poison, but what if they were to fail?

Wouldn’t the person afflicted end up being poisoned to death?

“Indeed. This duel is simply far too dangerous, so most physicians tend to avoid it. Yet, of all things, that fellow chose this one...” Zhong Dingchun gritted his teeth.

Curing poison was no joking matter.

Just one wrong move could cause the poison to mutate, rendering the existing antidotes useless. A life could easily be lost due to it!

“Wait! I understand that someone has to be afflicted with the poison in order to assess the physician’s poison curing skills accurately, but surely there’s no need to use a human as a test subject here? It should be possible to use Pill Sample Beasts instead. After all, physicians carry the noble mission of treating the ill and supporting the wounded. How could they take a life so lightly?”

There were spirit beasts with similar constitutions to a human, so there should be no need to use a human for the duel.

“It’s not like that...” Zhong Dingchun was just about to explain when Zhang Xuan’s voice suddenly echoed through the surroundings.

“Sure, a Duel of Poison Curing it shall be then. What are the rules?”

“It’s simple!” Upon seeing Zhang Xuan agree to the duel, You Xu heaved a sigh of relief. With a smirk, he said, “We will each take out a poison for the other to consume, and whoever succeeds in curing the poison within a given period of time will be deemed to be victorious!”

“We will be testing the poison with our bodies?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. I have already told you the rules, so what do you say about it? Do you dare take up the challenge? If you don’t... it will be considered your loss for this duel!” You Xu harrumphed coldly.

“They will each consume the poison of the other? If they fail to cure it, won’t they die on the spot?”

“Indeed! Aren’t the rules of this duel a little way too frightening?”

“Even though it’s called the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, it’s just a metaphor. To think that they would really end up

pitting their lives against one another in this duel...”

Upon hearing the rules, a huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

Even Wei Ranxue, School Head Zhao, and the others were stunned.

It was no wonder Zhong Dingchun was so furious upon hearing the name of the duel! Who would have thought that it was so vicious?

It would still be fine if they could cure it, but if they couldn't?

One must know that there were many kinds of mystical poisons in the world, and there were even some that could cause instantaneous death!

Just as everyone thought that Zhang Xuan would never agree to a duel with such ridiculous rules, the latter suddenly announced, “Fine, I agree to it!”

School Head Mo's face paled, and he hurriedly exclaimed, “You can't agree to it! That's too dangerous...”

He had heard about Yang shi's existence from Mo Gaoyuan. If Zhang shi were to be poisoned to death, there was no one in the Master Teacher Academy who could withstand Yang shi's wrath. The Master Teacher Academy could very well become a relic of the past due to this!

“Damn it, how can he be so shameless? He's a Saint realm expert, a different level of existence from Zhang shi. Even if Zhang shi has some formidable poison on him, it's unlikely to work against him!” Wei Ranxue's face also reddened in fury.

Naturally, the prowess of a poison was also correlated with a cultivator's cultivation realm. This was just like how a drop of water could drown an ant but was completely ineffective against an elephant.

As a higher level of existence, Saint realm experts could survive lethal doses of poison that would cause a Chrysalis realm expert to die many times over.

Considering the fundamental difference between their strength, Zhang Xuan was already at an overwhelming

disadvantage before the duel had even started!

In the first place, it couldn't be said that the rules of the duel were fair to both sides!

Infuriated, Zhao Bingxu turned to School Head Zhong with a livid expression on his face. "Zhong Dingchun, is this the character of a vice head of your Physician School?"

You Xu reneging on his promise was a dishonorable and shameful action for a master teacher to make, but ultimately, the medicinal herb was still his. It was his freedom of choice to choose whether he wanted to sell it or not, and there was no way anyone could force him into it.

But at this very moment, You Xu was exploiting his inherent advantages as a Saint realm expert to challenge the other party to a Duel of Poison Curing, which would put their lives at stake. This was a clear attempt to corner the other party and kill him!

This reflected a fatal flaw in You Xu's character.

School Head Zhao didn't have much contact with You Xu, so he didn't know him well as a person. However, to go to the extent of having a student of the academy killed despite being a vice school head, was that person really a master teacher?

While there were master teachers who were selfish and lacked compassion, even they wouldn't do something as disgraceful and vicious as this!

"I..." Zhong Dingchun's face turned crimson in embarrassment upon hearing those words.

While You Xu didn't infringe on the rules of the Life-and-Death Physician duel, his actions lacked the righteousness and magnanimity a master teacher should have.

There was nothing to say about his actions but shameful, utterly shameful.

"You need not blame School Head Zhong. I have had some interactions with You Xu before, and he wasn't like that before. Perhaps it is due to his age encroaching on him and his

fear of death growing, he becomes more willing to abandon his dignity and honor for his life.” School Head Mo sighed.

It is often only when death approaches that one’s desire to live kicks in. This desire to live gnaws at one, prompting one to do anything as long as one can push death further away from them.

School Head Mo continued, “The fear of death is never an easy hurdle to overcome. There are some who are able to uphold their morals and values even in the face of death, preserving their honor and dignity. But ultimately, most men are only mortals. They succumb to fear, clinging desperately to every additional day they can get. After all, honor and dignity mean nothing to a dead man.

“But as a master teacher and a vice school head of the Physician School, he isn’t just anyone. In order to extend his longevity, he goes around hunting down spirit beasts to procure their blood. It is only because we are colleagues and the misfortune he encountered in that expedition with the old principal that I had turned a blind eye to his actions. And yet, he still doesn’t know repentance!”

“Hunting down spirit beasts?” This was the first Zhong Dingchun was hearing of this, so he couldn’t help but turn to School Head Mo with a questioning gaze.

Those who trod on the Way of Medicine should possess a deference for life in their soul. While it was impossible to expect them to save everyone that they met, they should never allow a life to slip away easily, and this included the lives of spirit beasts as well.

Yet, to go around hunting spirit beasts just to sustain his life... Was this truly the doing of a physician?

“Indeed. I learned of this coincidentally a few days ago while looking into the whereabouts of Senior Byzantium Helios. It’s said that within the past year, just counting the number of Half-Saint realm beasts, You Xu has already killed more than twenty of them!” School Head Mo harrumphed.

“More than twenty? What is he killing so many Half-Saint beasts for?” School Head Zhong was astonished.

You Xu had done all of this discreetly behind his back, so despite being the head of the Physician School, Zhong Dingchun was completely unaware of this.

School Head Mo shook his head. “Regarding that, I am not too sure either.”

He had also been bewildered when he first heard the news, but considering that You Xu hadn’t done anything that would infringe on the interests of the Master Teacher Academy, he didn’t have a good reason to investigate the matter either.

“Even on the Hongyuan Mountain Range, Half-Saint beasts can be considered a great power. You Xu might be a Saint 1-dan expert, but it wouldn’t be easy for him to hunt them either. To kill over twenty of them in a single year...” Zhong Dingchun could hardly believe his ears.

Half-Saint realm beasts were able to stand their ground even against Saint realm cultivators. Even if they were no match for You Xu, they could have still fled easily.

How could so many of them be hunted in a single year?

Besides, it was not like there were Half-Saint beasts lying all over the Hongyuan Mountain Range. It might not be too difficult to find a single one, but finding twenty of them... Difficult!

“I am not too sure about it, but it seems like You Xu has some ties with the Cloudmist Ridge too. Regardless, I have verified the news regarding the twenty Half-Saint beasts, so there is no mistake about it. If you still harbor some doubts, you can question You Xu after the duel!” School Head Mo said.

“Un!” With many doubts still lingering in his head, Zhong Dingchun nodded slowly.

Most of the saint beasts in the Hongyuan Mountain Range resided in the Cloudmist Ridge. If the Cloudmist Ridge was involved in this matter as well, then there was a good chance that it was true.

“Put that aside for now. As the head of the Physician School, can’t you stop the duel?” Seeing that the duo was still in the mood to discuss other matters, Wei Ranxue snapped at them.

The urgent matter at hand was to deal with the duel between You Xu and Zhang Xuan. Otherwise, a life might be lost just like that.

“The Life-and-Death Physician Duel is conducted with the approval of the Physician Guild. Once it has started, it can no longer be stopped. If we were to interfere in it, we would just end up complicating things...” Zhong Dingchun shook his head.

It was not that he was unwilling to interfere in the matter but that he couldn’t!

The Life-and-Death Physician Duel was conducted with the approval of the Physician Guild headquarters, and attempting to interfere in it would mean challenging the authority of the entire Physician Guild. Even as one of the Ten Great Master Teachers, he didn’t have the power to go against the Physician Guild.

These were the rules, and they mustn’t be broken.

Otherwise, he wouldn’t have allowed You Xu to still stand proudly on the stage.

He would have already rushed forward to give him a good pummeling!

809 Cheers, Feel Free

Hearing Zhong Dingchun's words, Wei Ranxue questioned heatedly, "What can we do then? Are we to watch as they kill one another?"

She was still intending to study terpsichorean arts from Zhang Xuan. If something were to happen to him, who would she learn from?

"Calm down. It's impossible to interfere in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, but if we see either of them in mortal danger, we can advise that they give up. As long as they admit defeat, I believe that given our standing, they shouldn't go so far as to kill the other party despite our mediation!" Zhao Bingxu said.

After a moment of hesitation, Wei Ranxue was unable to come up with a better solution either, so she could only nod in agreement. "... I guess this is all we can do for now!"

While the few of them were communicating telepathically amongst themselves using their Saint Intent, a huge commotion had broken out amidst the crowd as well.

Those who were standing around the platform were nearly all physicians, and upon hearing that it would be a Duel of Poison Curing, they glanced at one another with astounded expressions on their faces.

This was no longer a means to resolve their conflict; it was a battle to the death!

In this duel, it was highly likely that one of them would lose their life.

For a student to actually go so far against a vice school head... Just what was he up to?

"Teacher..." Luo Qiqi, who had arrived just a moment ago, heard the news, and her face immediately paled in fright.

"A Duel of Poison Curing?" Standing beside her, Hu Yaoyao's eyebrows also shot up. It was difficult to tell what she was

thinking, but her fists were tightly clenched by her sides.

“Take out your poison, we will swap with one another. The time limit is an hour, and whoever succeeds in curing the poison first wins. If either of us dies... he can only blame himself for being indolent in his studies!” You Xu roared with laughter.

Based on the other party’s accomplishments, it was unlikely that he would be a match for him in a battle in the Way of Medicine. However, in the field of poison curing... there was not a person in the Master Teacher Academy who was a match for him!

“Fine by me!” Zhang Xuan replied with a cold smile.

“Let’s begin then!” You Xu flicked his wrist and took out a murky-green jade bottle. “This is my poison!”

With a flick of his finger, the bottle flew in Zhang Xuan’s direction.

Zhang Xuan raised his hands and caught it casually.

Even without opening the bottle, he could feel an astounding power rippling within it, threatening to burst forth at any moment.

Intrigued, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight and assessed it.

In an instant, he saw a black aura shrouding the bottle. Even if a Saint realm 1-dan expert were to consume it, their physiological structure would likely be destroyed in an instant, resulting in immediate death.

Uncorking the lid slightly, a pungent smell immediately surged from the bottle. Even the smell itself carried a poison that could result in the immediate death of an ordinary human.

“What... kind of poison is that?” Beneath the stage, Zhong Dingchun’s face warped in astonishment.

As the head of the Physician School, a 6-star pinnacle physician, he could sense the fearsome aura within the jade bottle. Even if it was him who came into contact with it, the

chances were that he wouldn't walk out from the encounter alive.

"This poison is extremely formidable?" School Head Mo asked worriedly.

"Formidable? Putting aside an hour, I don't think that I would be able to find a cure to it even if you were to give me a day!" Zhong Dingchun shook his head grimly.

"Even you are unable to find a cure to it? Then..." School Head Mo widened his eyes in shock.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhong Dingchun replied, "We can only have faith in Zhang Shi's capability... His proficiency in the Way of Medicine is far above mine, so it might be that he is able to achieve what I can't!"

After learning of Zhang Xuan's astounding deeds, Zhong Dingchun knew that the other party's medical skills were way above his, so it would be hard for him to make a judgement at the moment. Since that was the case, he decided to wait and see first.

"It seems you are prepared."

Corking the bottle, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to You Xu.

It was no wonder the other party proposed a Duel of Poison Curing. The poison he had at hand was indeed fearsome.

"This is a poison that I obtained coincidentally, and it is effective even against Saint realm experts. Where is your poison?" You Xu sneered coldly in response.

"My poison?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even though he was a poison master, he had never concocted a poison before, needless to say, one that would be capable of killing a Saint realm expert.

There wasn't any poison he could take out from his storage ring at that very instant.

"What? You don't have any? Going by the rules, that would mean a loss on your part..." You Xu said coldly.

The rules of the duel had been stated clearly, both parties had to offer a poison of their own to the other party. If Zhang Xuan was unable to take anything out, it would mean an automatic victory for You Xu.

It was not without reason that You Xu had chosen this format of duel. He didn't think that there was anyone in Hongyuan Empire who was capable of taking out a poison more potent than the one in his jade bottle.

“Of course I do, hold on for a moment!” Waving his hands casually, Zhang Xuan fell into a short moment of contemplation before turning his sights to School Head Mo.

“School Head Mo, by any chance, do you have some ‘Spirit Solution of Vigor’?”

“Spirit Solution of Vigor?”

School Head Mo was stunned for a moment before a peculiar expression slowly crept across his face. “Do you mean... the urine of saint beasts?”

“Indeed. If you do have some, can you give some to me?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The Spirit Solution of Vigor was the academic terminology for the urine of saint beasts, and it was commonly used amongst physicians so as to make it sound less dirty.

While the Spirit Solution of Vigor was only normal excretion for saint beasts, it was an object of fear for low-tier spirit beasts.

Beasts usually used their urine to demarcate their sphere of influence, and saint beasts were no exception to the rule.

As such, most beast tamers tended to carry some with them so as to deter the assault of spirit beasts.

You want some? School Head Mo frowned in confusion. He glanced at Zhong Dingchun, hoping that he might have some clue what Zhang Xuan was up to, but the latter looked equally perplexed as well.

The other party has taken out such a formidable poison, and instead of finding a poison to go against him, you are asking

for the urine of saint beasts instead?

Even though the Spirit Solution of Vigor is effective at keeping spirit beasts at bay, surely you aren't thinking that it'll work on Saint realm cultivators too?

"Of course!" But despite School Head Mo's bewilderment, he felt that Zhang Shi wouldn't be asking him for it without any reason. Thus, flicking his wrist, he took out a chi long gourd and threw it to the platform.

Catching the gourd, Zhang Xuan swirled it slightly, and an astringent odor immediately diffused from it. Satisfied, Zhang Xuan nodded and turned to You Xu. "Alright, this is my poison!"

"..."

In that instant, You Xu's face turned as dark as the bottom of a pot, and he nearly choked to death.

The heck!

I took out a lethal poison, and yet you presented me with a gourd of beast urine... What do you mean by that?

To call it your poison on top of that... Do I look blind to you?!

Everyone here saw with their own eyes that School Head Mo just passed it to you, and you haven't even uncapped it yet... The hell is this a poison!

You are just intentionally trying to humiliate me, aren't you?

Zhang Xuan, screw your grandmother...

Even if you want to humiliate me, you shouldn't have done this. This is cheating!

Not only was You Xu frenzied, the crowd who was watching the show from below also abruptly fell deathly silent upon seeing that scene. Their eyes bulged from their sockets, as if they had seen a ghost.

This is a Duel of Poison Curing, a duel that can very well determine one's life and death.

The poison that Vice School Head You took out carries a frightening aura, and just the smell makes one feel as if death is encroaching upon oneself. It is one thing for you not to take out a poison to match him, but... a gourd of urine?

More importantly... if you had taken it out discreetly, we wouldn't have thought much of it. But you asked School Head Mo for it in public and passed it to Vice School Head You Xu right after you received it ...

Could you have been any less discreet than that?

On the other hand, Zhong Dingchun also widened his eyes, and he nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

As a 6-star pinnacle physician, he naturally knew that the urine of saint beasts carried no poison whatsoever.

School Head Zhong turned to School Head Mo and asked, "School Head Mo, could it be that... there is something special about your Spirit Solution of Vigor?"

"There isn't. I just procured it from my saint beast not too long ago..." School Head Mo was also a little dazed by the abrupt twist of events before him. He couldn't comprehend what the young man on the stage was up to.

"What's wrong? I have already prepared my poison. If you dare not drink it, it'll be your loss..." Zhang Xuan said as he continued holding the gourd up to You Xu, who was still reluctant to take it.

"You..." You Xu's breathing hastened, and in that instant, he was truly tempted to rush forward and crush the neck of the young man standing before him.

He had thought that this would be an easy duel for him. No matter how potent the other party's poison was, there was no way the other party would win. Yet, who could have known that the fellow wouldn't play by the rules, presenting him with a gourd of urine instead... If he were to drink it, even if he won this duel, he would never be able to hold his head high before anyone anymore!

Drinking urine to achieve a victory... Screw that!

But if he didn't drink it, that would mean that he was backing out from the duel, and going by the rules of the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, Zhang Xuan would be able to do anything to him...

He was a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, the vice head of the Physician School... How did he end up getting cornered like that?

Seeing the other party's agitated breathing and hateful gaze, Zhang Xuan sneered coldly. "Stop wasting time. If you aren't going to drink it, just surrender. You are the one who decided on the content of the duel, not me!"

In truth, he hadn't intended to humiliate You Xu either.

He had no poison on him, and so far, the only books he had read on poison were those from the Red Lotus Ridge Poison Hall. As such, his current proficiency as a poison master was still only at 2-star. With his current capability, it was impossible for him to concoct a poison capable of killing a Saint realm expert.

Besides, even if he could, he didn't have the ingredients on him to do so at this very instant!

Without any poison formula or medicinal ingredients for him to work with, how in the world was he going to concoct a poison?

Left with no choice, Zhang Xuan could only bank on his Heaven's Path zhenqi.

After learning the Heaven's Path Poison Art, he was able to turn his zhenqi into either a medicine or a lethal poison at a whim.

If he wanted to win against You Xu in the Duel of Poison Curing, he would have to use this.

However, it would be difficult to hide the Heaven's Path zhenqi from You Xu, a Saint realm expert, and considering the unbelievable purity of it, the revelation of its existence could potentially bring Zhang Xuan great trouble. Thus, he had to use something with an overpowering odor to conceal it.

While strong alcohol did work against Luo Qiqi and the others, it was doubtful whether it would be effective on a Saint realm expert or not.

On the other hand, the Spirit Solution of Vigor carried an astringent odor. On top of that, drinking such a thing in public, the other party would surely try to gulp it down as fast as he could so as to get it over with as soon as possible. With that, the Heaven's Path zhenqi would be able to swiftly fuse together with the other party's own zhenqi before he could detect anything.

Once this was done, putting aside a 6-star physician, even if a 9-star physician was there that day, they would be helpless before this situation.

The Heaven's Path zhenqi was not a lethal poison but incredibly pure zhenqi. As such, unlike typical poison, the body wouldn't inhibit its movements at all, allowing it to easily seep into the vitals of a cultivator. Even if the cultivator were to notice its existence, it would be impossible for them to expel it from their body.

In the truest sense, it could be considered an incurable disease.

"This is a Duel of Poison Curing, and yet, you offered me a gourd of saint beast urine instead. This is an infringement of the rules!" You Xu gnashed his teeth together in savagery.

"As a physician, you should know that saint beast urine is a type of medicinal ingredient as well, otherwise it wouldn't be known as the Spirit Solution of Vigor among physicians either. It is used to treat 'Berserk Syndrome', 'Ice-Fire Zhenqi Clots', 'Beast Scabs', and several hundred different types of illnesses.

"Since it's a medicinal ingredient, naturally it can be used as a poison as well. Your poison is concocted out of many medicinal ingredients, so why can't mine be the same? Since I am willing to consume yours, you shouldn't have any problem with mine as well. If you refuse to drink it, I will have to ask you to just admit defeat!" Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

Despite the astringent odor of the Spirit Solution of Vigor which left one on the verge of fainting with just a sniff, it did possess medicinal properties as well.

And anything that possessed medicinal properties could be utilized as poison. This was common knowledge among physicians.

Since the Spirit Solution of Vigor could be classified as a poison as well, this wasn't an infringement of the rules.

Seeing that there was no way around it, You Xu gritted his teeth furiously and spat, "You want me to admit defeat? Dream on! Fine, I will drink it. However, we shall start at the same time!"

"Start at the same time? There is no need for that!"

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan poured the poison in the jade bottle into his mouth before turning his gaze back to You Xu with an inviting gesture.

"Cheers, feel free!" One chi = 33.3cm

810 Zhang Xuan's Poison

“He drank it all, just like that?”

“Cheers? Does he think that that is wine?”

“To drink lethal poison so nonchalantly... he sure is cool!”

“Indeed. He might be a freshman, but with this, he has my complete respect!”

...

Seeing Zhang Xuan gulping down the poison without any hesitation, a huge commotion broke out among the crowd.

Previously, when he had first uncorked the lid, everyone could feel the overwhelming aura of the lethal poison contained inside.

Putting aside physicians, even poison masters would not dare to swallow such a poison!

Yet, the young man before them had gulped it down casually as if he was drinking wine, even smacking his lips when he was done. Just his courage in itself was truly admirable! Even the seniors who had their reservations about him couldn't help but feel a surge of respect for him.

There was probably not a second person in the Master Teacher Academy who would willingly drink lethal poison as readily as him!

“You...” Not expecting the other party to drink his poison so quickly, leaving him no time to react at all, You Xu's mouth twitched uncontrollably.

What do you mean by cheers, and that it's my turn?

The hell! With such a huge gourd, there is at least four to five jin[1] of urine inside! On top of that, the astringent odor... How am I to drink this?

“I have already drunk your lethal poison, but you still aren't going to drink mine? Fine by me as well. You are the one who

set the rules, and you have failed to follow them. Since that's the case, I will report it to the Physician Guild this instant to have your physician license revoked!" Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

"You..." You Xu's complexion turned extremely awful, and he felt as if he was going to explode at any moment.

He had heard of how troublesome this fellow was, but he had never thought much of it. To think that it would actually be true!

After destroying the Tower of Physicians and pressurizing him into accepting his duel... the other party was even going to the extent of forcing him to drink saint beast urine now!

Refuse, and he would lose the duel, subjecting him to the whims of the other party.

Drink, and the reputation he had built up painstakingly over the course of his life would go down the drain.

There was simply no way out for him.

Neither option was one he could accept.

He had thought that he was ingenious to have thought a Duel of Poison Curing, but who knew that it would turn out to be the stinkiest decision he had ever made!

Forget it! Even though the Spirit Solution of Vigor is urine, it's still a type of medicinal ingredient...

But ultimately, could one's life possibly be more important than one's reputation?

"Fine, I'll drink it then!"

Gritting his teeth in determination, You Xu pinched his nose and took the gourd. Tilting his head upwards, he gulped the Spirit Solution of Vigor down.

The predecessors of the Physician Guild had also needed to consume all kinds of saint beast urines back then in order to formulate prescriptions to treat specific illnesses. Thinking about it from that perspective, drinking the Spirit Solution of Vigor didn't seem to be much of a deal anymore.

Gudong, gudong!

The odor from the Spirit Solution of Vigor was so overpowering that You Xu's lips began twitching wildly, and tears streamed down his cheeks.

Elder Mo's gourd was extremely large, storing around four to five jin of the Spirit Solution. Despite the speed at which You Xu was gulping it down, it still took him three minutes before he was able to ingest all of it.

The urine of saint beasts was far harsher to the nose than a human's. Putting aside whether there was any poison in the Spirit Solution of Vigor in the first place, just the smell itself already left You Xu extremely nauseated, and he felt as if he would vomit at any moment.

"I'm done!"

After exhaling a mouthful of foul-smelling breath, You Xu glared at Zhang Xuan savagely with a reddened face.

Just as You Xu was going to see if his poison had started to act on Zhang Xuan yet, he suddenly saw the latter gazing at him in admiration, even giving a thumbs up toward him.

"You drank it all? Impressive! When I said feel free, I meant that you don't have to finish drinking the entire gourd. Actually, my poison only requires you to drink a mouthful. I truly didn't expect Vice School Head You to have such a unique taste, gulping down an entire gourd of it... I am truly in awe of you!"

The purpose of the Spirit Solution of Vigor was just to conceal the unique presence of his Heaven's Path zhenqi. You Xu just had to drink a single mouthful for the Heaven's Path zhenqi infused in it to seep into his body.

Who could have known that the other party would be so drastic, finishing such a large gourd to the last drop? He sure was impressive!

"You..."

You Xu's body swayed weakly, and a mouthful of orange-yellowish liquid spewed from his mouth. A repugnant odor

could be smelled from his breath.

A mouthful is sufficient? Screw you!

You are toying with me, aren't you?

“I will remember this! Let's see if you can laugh until the very end! If you can't neutralize the poison within the next hour, you will have lost the duel!”

Knowing that it was impossible for him to win a verbal fight against Zhang Xuan, You Xu gritted his teeth and harrumphed coldly.

“Neutralize the poison within the next hour? There's no need to be that troublesome. I have already neutralized the poison...” Zhang Xuan looked at You Xu with a wry smile on his face.

The latter's poison was indeed formidable. If it had been in the past, even with Zhang Xuan's Heaven's Path zhenqi, it would still have taken quite a bit of effort for him to neutralize it.

However, the previous transfusion of soul essence with Wei Ruyan had resulted in a change of his constitution, granting his body with properties reminiscent of the Innate Poison Body.

To the current Zhang Xuan, drinking You Xu's poison was not much different from drinking any beverage. Its lethality was completely ineffective on him.

On the contrary, the spirit from the medicinal herbs used to concoct the poison further reinforced his cultivation and his soul. His soul had grown yet again from its size of ten meters. Even though he would have to draw out his soul in order to ascertain how much the growth was, it was a fact that his soul energy had grown significantly more condensed.

In other words, not only was the poison not harmful to him, it even boosted his cultivation.

“You have already neutralized the poison?” You Xu staggered, and he nearly fell from the stage.

Are you for real?

That poison was his greatest trump card! With it, he could even kill opponents who possessed a higher cultivation than him... Yet, the fellow hadn't attempted to consume an antidote or done anything at all, how in the world did he manage to neutralize his poison?

“That’s right. If I’m not mistaken, the core ingredients of your poison are ‘Green-leafed Heart Nexus Plant’ and ‘Soulless Flower’, and you added another 49 medicinal ingredients to complement them. Should an ordinary Saint consume just a single drop, their heart and mind would be corroded, resulting in a swift death.

“Not only so, this poison has the effect of numbing one’s nerves as well. When diluted heavily, it can be used to make others obey one’s commands. This property of it is extremely potent as well, working on Saint realm experts too.”

At which, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly. “The poison you concocted is indeed formidable. However, it is nothing before me! It just happens that I do know how to make an antidote to it. Three qian of Green Bamboo Shoot, two liang of Silverwear Grass, four qian of White Angelica Wood... Grind all 23 medicinal ingredients into powder, and that would be the antidote to your poison. There isn’t even a need to concoct anything at all.”

“Y-you...”

Every word that Zhang Xuan spoke made You Xu widen his eyes a little more. By the time he was done saying everything, the latter’s eyes were already bulging as if he had seen a ghost.

Given that You Xu had the poison in his hands, it was natural that he would have the antidote as well. Regardless of whether it was the poison or the antidote, the other party’s analysis was spot-on!

In other words, the reason Zhang Xuan was still fine despite drinking his poison was because he had neutralized it instantaneously...

Was that still the feat of a human?

Just how could one possibly do that?

Why did it feel as if he wasn't consuming poison but just having a meal instead?

"Am I right?" Zhang Xuan glanced at You Xu with a provocative smile.

When he received the jade bottle, he had used the Library of Heaven's Path to analyze its content. As a result, he knew the various ingredients of the poison, and from that, he was able to formulate an antidote to it.

Saint realm poison? A piece of cake!

"You... Fine, you might be right! However, this isn't your victory yet... I can neutralize your poison, too! Open!"

Gritting his teeth, You Xu's zhenqi began surging furiously.

Hong long!

In the next instant, all of his acupoints abruptly opened, and a fiery aura immediately gushed into the surroundings. In an instant, it felt as if he was a searing cauldron.

"This is... the 'Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art'?" Zhong Dingchun exclaimed with narrowed eyes.

Hearing the lengthy name of the technique that the other party had stated, School Head Zhao, School Head Mo, and the others turned to him with questioning gazes.

"This is a technique created by 6-star pinnacle Physician Qian Buyou five thousand years ago. This technique allows one to expel the poison within one's body without consuming an antidote.

"Despite the profound variations of poison in the world, poison is, in essence, a foreign substance that isn't compatible with the human body, invading one's meridians and acupoints. The Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art was designed based on this fundamental interpretation of poison; by using one's body as a cauldron and one's zhenqi as a power source, it expels all poisonous substances from one's acupoints in a gaseous form!

"However, due to the technique's inability to clearly differentiate between poison and vitals of the body, the usage

of this technique inflicts permanent damage on the foundation of one's body. Nevertheless, it has never failed in dealing with poison before. As long as it isn't the kind of poison that results in instantaneous death, this technique will be able to resolve it. However, this technique went missing a few thousand years ago... How did You Xu learn it?" Zhong Dingchun explained with a deep frown.

The Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art was an incredibly effective skill in dealing with poison, but at the same time, it was an extremely difficult skill to master. Furthermore, it was said to have disappeared from the world several thousand years ago.

It was bizarre that You Xu knew of the technique when he, the head of the Physician School, didn't know of it.

On top of that, the poison which the other party had just taken out was also something he had never heard of before.

His doubts only served to deepen after Zhang Xuan described the prescription.

The core ingredients of the poison, Green-leafed Heart Nexus Plant and Soulless Flower, were medicinal herbs that had gone extinct several centuries ago. It was impossible to find them anywhere now... If that was the case, how did that fellow concoct the poison?

On top of that, even though poison masters and physicians shared many similarities in their fields of specialty, the core capabilities they possessed were still different from one another. It would be difficult for a physician to concoct a lethal poison capable of killing a Saint realm expert unless there was a poison master working with him!

But... poison masters had always been the nemeses of physicians. Could that fellow have some secret connection with them?

I will have to question him thoroughly on this matter after this matter is over... Zhong Dingchun thought with a grim expression.

While Zhong Dingchun was contemplating the issue, School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others came to a realization upon hearing his words.

“No wonder he challenged Zhang Shi to a Duel of Poison Curing! He has such an ace up his sleeves!”

Despite the various reasons that You Xu had come up with to convince Zhang Xuan to accept the duel, it was still bizarre that a physician would choose to compete not on patient treating but poison curing. It turned out that he did have the absolute confidence in achieving victory over Zhang Xuan on this aspect.

A technique that could resolve any poison easily... It was natural that he would choose the format of the duel to be poison curing, especially after hearing about the formidable feats Zhang Xuan had performed in the Physician School!

Hong long!

While they were chatting, a yellowish gas gushed out of Vice School Head You's body, reminiscent of steam fleeing from the various apertures of a cauldron.

“Pungent!”

“This foul smell is really intolerable!”

“Hurry up and seal your six senses, or else you will be stunk to death...”

“Sealing the six senses don't work at all! That pungent gas seeps right into our acupoints...”

...

As more and more yellowish gas was expelled from Vice School Head You's body, the crowd beneath frowned in displeasure.

The odor of the Spirit Solution of Vigor alone was already intolerable to any human. Yet, the Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art further refined the concentration of the Spirit Solution of Vigor before releasing it into the air, worsening the odor many times over.

Even Saint realm experts like Zhao Bingxu, Wei Ranxue, and the others couldn't stand it anymore, and they hurriedly created a barrier of zhenqi to ward off the odor.

Otherwise, they might really just faint from the sheer acidity of the stench!

Hu!

After some time, You Xu's body finally stopped expelling yellowish gas. His entire face was ghastly pale from frailty, and it looked like he had been choked by the stench as well.

However, the excited gleam in his eyes couldn't be concealed. Flinging his sleeves, he declared proudly, "I have neutralized your poison too!"

While he did take longer than Zhang Xuan to neutralize the poison, arguably, he did consume the poison later, and the quantity he consumed was much more as well. As long as he were to grasp onto these points firmly, he should be able to force the duel into a draw.

"You have neutralized my poison?"

Seeing You Xu's confident face, Zhang Xuan shook his head and gazed at You Xu in sympathy. "Do you even know what poison you are inflicted with?"

You Xu harrumphed coldly. "No matter what kind of poison you used, my Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art is able to resolve it easily..."

However, before he could finish his words, he suddenly felt an intense pain assaulting his chest.

Pfffft!

A mouthful of blood spurted from his mouth, and his body began shaking uncontrollably. At the same time, his face swiftly turned black.

You Xu widened his eyes as his body stiffened in shock.

"I haven't neutralized your poison yet?"

[1] (~2 to 2.5kg)

811 Busybody

As a 6-star pinnacle physician, You Xu's understanding of the human body had reached a profound level. He could easily tell whether he had been poisoned or not.

In just that brief moment, he instantaneously realized that the lethal poison had already reached his vitals. At such a point, there was nothing he could do to salvage the situation anymore.

Unknowingly, his fate had already been sealed.

Didn't the Grand Circulation Cauldron Poison Expelling Art dispel the poison from his body?

Just what was going on?

"That is right, you didn't neutralize my poison at all..."

"I didn't neutralize it? How is that possible!"

Unable to believe it, You Xu anxiously drove his zhenqi in an attempt to suppress the poison within his body, but his actions were completely futile. Flustered, he pointed a finger at Zhang Xuan and yelled furiously, "Could it be that your poison was not in the Spirit Solution of Vitality? T-that... That's cheating!"

He had already expelled every last drop of the saint beast urine, but the poison still remained in his body. Could the saint beast urine have been a cover to conceal the true poison?

"I cheated?"

Zhang Xuan gazed at You Xu disdainfully and bellowed authoritatively, "We were sincere and polite when we pleaded with you to sell the Ten-leafed Flower to us, which we needed urgently to save a life. It was one thing for you to reject us, but you exploited Wei Changfeng's desperation to save his daughter and baited him into picking a Cloudmist Flower from the Cloudmist Ridge, causing him to suffer a tragic death

under the relentless assault of saint beasts... And yet, you are accusing me of cheating?”

Zhang Xuan slowly walked forward as he spoke, and he carried an overpowering disposition that made one dare not look him in the eye.

“Vice School Head You made them pick a Cloudmist Flower from the Cloudmist Ridge? Isn't that no different from sending them to their deaths?”

“Is that the reason behind the conflict between them?”

“I thought that Zhang Shi only challenged Vice School Head You in order to make a name for himself. I didn't expect for there to be such a story behind this matter...”

...

Hearing the resounding and powerful voice on the stage, a huge commotion broke out amidst the crowd.

Most of those gathered here had only known that Zhang Xuan had challenged Vice School Head You, but they didn't know the story behind it. After hearing his words, they finally understood why Zhang Xuan would go to the extent of challenging a vice school head of the academy.

“I...”

Hearing the criticisms below the stage, You Xu panicked. On top of that, watching as Zhang Xuan's seemingly immense figure advanced toward him, he suddenly felt a deep surge of fear, and he subconsciously took a step back.

“But nevertheless, as per your request, I managed to procure the Cloudmist Flower. Yet, when I went to your residence to make the trade with you, you insisted that the Cloudmist Flower should be alive. Fine, since that's your request, I revived the Cloudmist Flower as per your wish, but you still refused to make the trade... Was I the one cheating then?”

Zhang Xuan continued to advance on You Xu with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“I...” You Xu trembled in fear as he took yet another step back.

“You said that the Ten-leafed Flower hadn’t matured yet and thus couldn’t be sold. Thus, I used my secret art and expended my zhenqi to hasten its maturity. But after all was done, you still refused to make the trade, disregarding the honor you have as a master teacher... Was that me cheating as well?”

It felt as if Zhang Xuan’s sharp words were going to penetrate You Xu’s soul. His voice echoed loudly from the stage, sounding clearly in everyone’s ears.

“I...”

Three consecutive “I”s, You Xu’s lips parted in an attempt to refute Zhang Xuan’s claims, but he simply couldn’t find other words to say.

What the other party had said were facts. There was no way to refute facts.

“There is actually such a matter?”

“It is one thing for Vice School You to refuse to sell the medicinal herb to Zhang shi, but to make things difficult for him on top of that, resulting in the loss of a life... That’s going too far!”

“I used to respect Vice School Head You and viewed him as my role model, but to think that he’s actually such a person... He has truly soiled the reputation of the Physician School this time around!”

...

Indignant and shocked exclamations broke out amidst the crowd.

Previously, there were many seniors who thought that Zhang Xuan was being extremely arrogant and disrespectful to challenge a vice school head despite merely being a freshman. However, after hearing these words, they realized that he was provoked into doing it!

Who could have expected a 6-star master teacher to actually be so vicious and dishonorable? If they were in Zhang shi’s shoes, they would have been burning in fury as well!

“The Ten-leafed Flower is a medicinal herb that I have cultivated painstakingly. If I wish to sell it, good for you. But if I refuse, who are you to question my judgement? Am I to be labeled a criminal just because I refused to sell it to you?”

Seeing that the public opinion was completely against him, You Xu gritted his teeth and forced himself to stand his ground.

“The Ten-leafed Flower is yours, so it’s your choice to decide whether you want to sell it or not. I can’t force you into it. However, it’s also my choice whether or not I want to challenge you to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, what can you do about it?” Zhang Xuan said coldly.

“You...” You Xu’s body stiffened.

Since he couldn’t even defeat the other party in a Duel of Poison Curing, there was no way he would stand a chance in anything else!

In other words... victory was impossible for him in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel against the other party!

Furthermore, even if the other party did not dare kill him with so many people watching, the problem lay in that the other party could challenge him in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel any time he wished!

There was no way he could take it if that were to happen!

With each Life-and-Death Physician Duel, he would lose a layer of his skin. Come a few more times, and he would be on the verge of death, if not dead by then.

“You... Fine, I admit that I am no match for you! I will compensate you however you want me to, is that enough?” You Xu spat through gritted teeth.

“Compensate?” At this point, Zhang Xuan was already standing right before You Xu. Gazing down on him coldly, he asked, “Are you able to compensate for Wei Changfeng’s life?”

You Xu took a step back fearfully before frustration finally overwhelmed him, and he bellowed angrily, “Just what do you

want then?!”

“Simple... I want you to pay with your life!” Zhang Xuan uttered coldly.

The fellow before him was the cause of Wei Changfeng’s death. Thus, there was only one thing he wanted from the other party—his life!

Because of you, Wei Changfeng was forced to scale the Cloudmist Ridge in order to save his daughter, resulting in his eventual death at the hands of a saint beast... As the culprit behind it all, how can I allow you to continue living in this world?

“You want me to pay with my life?” You Xu’s face warped in savagery. “I am the vice head of the Physician School, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, but you want me to give up my life simply because of an insignificant figure like him? Why should I do that?”

“Why should you do that? HAHHAHA!” Zhang Xuan roared with laughter. “You want to know why? Let me tell you why then!

“Simply because I solved 503 problems on the Wall of Dilemma singlehandedly!

“Simply because I have left 432 new treatment methods on the Malady Platform!

“Simply because I have contributed far more effective solutions to the illnesses recorded in the Ancestor Forest, allowing them to be resolved easily!

“Simply because I did not make a single mistake in the 5-star and 6-star physician examinations, leaving behind perfect treatment methods for 73 illnesses!

“I might have destroyed the Tower of Physicians, but my contribution to the Physician Guild is far greater than that. It is in view of this that the headquarters granted me permission to challenge you to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, and yet you still dare to ask me why?

“I defeated you fair and square as a physician. Why, you ask? Simply because I defeated you in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel!”

As if an almighty deity from the heavens above, Zhang Xuan exuded an inviolable aura that allowed no one to question him in the slightest.

You Xu would take a step back fearfully with every single point that Zhang Xuan made, but Zhang Xuan would push forward with a forceful step each time, cornering him slowly.

“I...”

Eventually, You Xu suddenly realized that the ground behind him was empty; he had reached the edge of the stage.

Indeed, the other party hadn't played any trickery against him. What the other party depended on was his true capability to challenge him to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel, and he had won fair and square as well. There was nothing You Xu could say to refute that.

“Kill yourself!” Zhang Xuan said with unquestionable authority.

At this point, You Xu's face was completely pale, and he couldn't speak a word at all. His confidence had been completely shattered.

“I...” In this instant, he felt as if he was an utter failure, and his very existence was shameful. Rather than to live so pathetically, he would be better off dead.

Thus, he raised his hand and pressed it down forcefully on his head.

“Hold it right there!”

But just as the palm was going to strike down on You Xu's head, a deafening bellow suddenly echoed from the sky, and a figure descended to the ground.

Along with the bellow, You Xu's body suddenly jolted, and the lifeless expression vanished from his face. He lifted his head to look at Zhang Xuan once more, but this time, his eyes were reddened with fury.

“You dare to use the Impartation of Heaven’s Will on me? I will kill you!” You Xu howled in rage.

No matter how slow he was, it was clear that the other party had used the Impartation of Heaven’s Will against him. Utilizing the pressure of the heavens, the other party made him lose himself. If not for that bellow snapping him out of his trance in the nick of time, he would already be dead!

Hong long!

The overpowering aura of a Saint 1-dan pinnacle expert engulfed the entire area, and the stage creaked loudly under the pressure, threatening to shatter at any moment.

Gathering destructive might in his palm, You Xu thrust his fist at Zhang Xuan furiously.

In face of the other party’s offense, Zhang Xuan stood proudly with his hands behind his back, viewing the other party’s attack with disdain.

“Enough, Vice School Head You!”

Just as the attack was about to land on Zhang Xuan, another bellow sounded, and a massive hand fell in between Zhang Xuan and You Xu, dissipating You Xu’s offense.

With the disappearance of the attack, Zhang Xuan sighed.

The Life-and-Death Physician Duel was conducted under the supervision of the headquarters. Had You Xu dared to land that palm on him, he would have been killed remotely by the headquarters!

It was a pity that someone had stopped him.

Turning to the intervening figure, Zhang Xuan saw a white-bearded old man dressed in a master teacher robe. He carried an air of dominance about him, hinting at his extraordinary standing.

“You are Zhang Xuan?” The old man glanced at Zhang Xuan emotionlessly with an overbearing disposition.

Looking at how the old man was still putting on airs here after stopping him from killing You Xu, Zhang Xuan frowned in

displeasure.

“I am the head of the Apothecary School, Lu Feng!”

As the old man introduced himself, he stared down at Zhang Xuan impassively, exerting immense pressure on him. “No matter what, You Xu is a vice school head of the academy. Even if he has erred, he doesn’t deserve to die. How about this, I will have him give the Ten-leafed Flower to you and compensate you with some spirit stones, and we will call this matter off!”

“Call this matter off?” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened.

If not for this old man interfering in this matter, You Xu would have already died by now!

A Ten-leafed Flower and some spirit stones... Could these things bring Wei Changfeng back to life?

Waving his hands grandly, School Head Lu Feng said, “Yes. By challenging a teacher’s authority, you have already violated the respect a student ought to show a teacher. If you drop this matter now, the academy will be lenient with you for this matter...”

“Be lenient with me?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes were utterly cold. “What if I insist on taking his life?”

“Humph, this is the Master Teacher Academy! Do you think that a student like you will be allowed to act as you please?”

A freshman should have leaped at the opportunity to resolve the matter peacefully, especially since he was already mediating it. Yet, the other party dared to talk back at him publicly. School Head Lu Feng’s face immediately turned livid.

“Besides, You Xu is not only a physician but a 6-star pinnacle master teacher of the Master Teacher Pavilion as well. How he should be dealt with is a matter for the Master Teacher Pavilion and Master Teacher Academy to discuss. A 4-star master teacher like you has no place in a matter like this!”

“Are you the principal of the academy?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes narrowed.

“I’m not!”

Not expecting Zhang Xuan to ask such a question, School Head Lu Feng was stunned for an instant. However, he swiftly recovered and said, “But with the disappearance of the old principal, and considering the fact that the Apothecary School is the number one school in the academy, I can be considered the stand-in principal, and I have the right to determine the major affairs within the academy. Don’t worry, my words count here. Not even You Xu will be able to override my decision!”

“Since you aren’t the principal, what are you spouting so much nonsense for? Stop being a busybody and move aside!” Upon hearing that the other party wasn’t the principal, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up, and he flung his sleeves majestically.

“Otherwise, shall I challenge your Apothecary School right here, right now?”

812 Seniority

“What?”

“Did he just say that School Head Lu is a busybody?”

“He’s going to challenge the Apothecary School?”

Watching the spectacle on the stage, the crowd below felt as if they were going bonkers.

Ever since the disappearance of the old principal, most of the affairs in the academy had been taken care of by School Head Lu Feng. He might not be the official principal, but the power he wielded was as good as one.

Furthermore, he was also the de facto leader of the Ten Great Master Teachers, and School Head Mo and the others usually heeded his words for most affairs, granting him immense influence as well... Yet, a freshman dared to say that he was a busybody and asked him to move aside. That was truly brazen!

“Why is Zhang shi so reckless?” School Head Wei, School Head Zhao, and the others nearly fainted after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words.

They were thinking that with School Head Lu’s intervention, the matter could be resolved swiftly. However, they didn’t think that Zhang shi would take such a forceful stand on this matter.

School Head Lu was an austere man, and he regarded discipline and order very highly. Insulting him in public was an immense humiliation to him; there was no doubt that he would fly into a rage over this matter.

And just as they had expected, School Head Lu’s face darkened, and a steely glint could be seen in his narrowed eyes. With a voice reminiscent of the ominous rumbling of thunder, he bellowed, “What did you say?”

“Are you deaf? But even if you are deaf, surely your eyes should be able to see, right? It’s in my capacity as a 6-star

physician that I have challenged You Xu in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel. In this matter, there is no distinction between teacher or student, so we can only be considered peers... So, don't bother using those principles to your convenience to pressure me!

“Also, we haven't even determined the winner of our duel yet, but you barged in and interfered in our battle willfully, terminating it forcefully... To talk to me about rules, why don't you try to practice what you preach?” Zhang Xuan sneered coldly, with a fearless gaze.

While it was indeed a taboo for a student to challenge a teacher's authority, Zhang Xuan had challenged You Xu to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel as a fellow 6-star physician, so until the moment the duel ended, his position would not be that of a student but a 6-star physician.

Even if Lu Feng was a 6-star master teacher, he could only be considered a peer in the course of the duel.

And as a fellow peer, what right did Lu Feng have to interfere in a fight between him and You Xu?

“You...” Lu Feng pointed his finger at Zhang Xuan with a livid face before flinging his sleeves backward furiously.

“Sharp-tongued, aren't you? But regardless of what you say, I won't allow any harm to come to You Xu today. I will personally report this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion to have them annul this matter with the Physician Guild!”

“You intend to protect him?” Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed menacingly.

For a moment, he was a little perplexed by why Lu Feng would go to such an extent to protect You Xu, but after a moment of contemplation, it suddenly struck him.

Back then, when he and Wei Changfeng were attempting to purchase the Ten-leafed Flower, the master teacher who went to purchase a medicinal herb from You Xu seemed to have gone as Lu Feng's representative.

The price was low, and the exchange was completed swiftly without any trouble. Considering this, the relationship between

the both of them must be fairly good.

But that was to be expected. As an apothecary and a herbologist in the Master Teacher Academy, the two of them had probably worked together on multiple occasions over the years, and this gradually built camaraderie between them. Otherwise, Lu Feng wouldn't have gone to the extent of offending the Physician Guild to intervene in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel.

“That's right!” Lu Feng declared grandly. “Vice School Head You, let's leave. I would like to see who in the Master Teacher Academy dares to stop me!”

“Yes!” Seeing that School Head Lu was firmly standing up for him, You Xu heaved a sigh of relief and hurriedly followed behind him.

He had already lost the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, so if he were to remain here, the only thing awaiting him was misfortune. At the current moment, the best thing he could do was to leave this area as soon as possible.

Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up as he harrumphed coldly. “Leave? I haven't given him the permission to leave yet, who dares take him away?”

Glancing coldly at You Xu, he commanded authoritatively, “After disregarding your honor and morals, what rights do you have to remain as a master teacher? Kneel down!”

“Kneel down?” You Xu was stunned to hear Zhang Xuan's abrupt words. Just as he was about to sneer in response, he abruptly felt an inexplicable power striking his acupoints, and excruciating pain assaulted him.

Putong!

Before he could say anything more, his knees caved in and fell to the ground.

Having planted his Heaven's Path zhenqi within You Xu's body, it took nothing more than a thought for Zhang Xuan to subdue the other party.

“You...” Lu Feng's countenance turned hostile.

Right after he said that he would bring You Xu back, Zhang Xuan made You Xu kneel onto the ground.

That was a direct slap to his face, a resounding one at that.

When did his standing as the head of the Apothecary School become so worthless?

“Zhang Xuan, are you sure you want to go against me?” Lu Feng glared at Zhang Xuan with a disquieting gaze.

“Go against you?”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “You aren’t worthy of that! To tell you the truth, I didn’t give a single shit about you before you appeared!”

Possessing the Library of Heaven’s Path, there was nothing beneath the heavens that could stand against him. A mere head of the Apothecary School wasn’t even worthy of his notice; if the other party hadn’t come here to cause a ruckus, why would he have bothered wasting his effort going against him?

“You...” Hearing those words, Lu Feng nearly rushed forward in a frenzy to tear Zhang Xuan apart.

“Enough, I don’t wish to waste any more words on you. Until the Life-and-Death Physician Duel ends, no one will be taking him away. Putting aside the fact that you are only a stand-in principal, even if the official principal of the academy was here today, the only thing he would be taking away from here is You Xu’s corpse!” Zhang Xuan declared authoritatively.

With his Heaven’s Path zhenqi planted deep in the other party’s body, the difference between You Xu’s life and death hinged on a single thought of his. No matter who it was, they wouldn’t be taking You Xu away from here alive today!

“You dare!” Lu Feng roared furiously

“What do I have to fear?” With a wry smile, Zhang Xuan turned to You Xu and ordered, “He thinks that I don’t dare do anything. Why don’t you try spurting a mouthful of blood to prove him wrong?”

The next moment, an inexplicable power suddenly rampaged within the kneeling You Xu’s innards, and unable to hold

himself back, ‘uweh!’, fresh blood gushed from his mouth, dyeing the entire area crimson.

“You...” Lu Feng nearly lost his sanity on the spot.

That was a blatant provocation toward him!

“Why? You still want to try me? You Xu, continue until he submits!” Zhang Xuan ordered with his hands behind his back.

Pu! Pu! Pu!

At Zhang Xuan’s command, You Xu began spurting blood endlessly. In just a few moments, his face had already turned ghastly pale, and it felt as if he might pass away at any moment.

“Stop it!” Seeing that his old friend would die if he were to continue spewing blood, School Head Lu Feng yelled furiously, but he realized that he was completely helpless to stop Zhang Xuan.

The poison which Zhang Xuan had planted into You Xu in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel was simply far too potent. Otherwise, the latter wouldn’t have been forced to obey his commands either, kneeling and spewing blood on command.

“Stop!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

Only after that word was uttered did You Xu finally stop throwing up blood. His body fell feebly to the ground, and he gasped frantically for air. For a moment there, he could almost feel death’s embrace.

Ever since becoming a master teacher a thousand years ago, he had never suffered such humiliation before.

Seeing that You Xu had finally stopped throwing up blood, Lu Feng immediately rushed forward to feed him a general antidote.

You Xu swallowed the antidote and drove his zhenqi to allow the antidote to permeate through his body. A moment later, however, he shook his head.

As a grade-6 pill, the antidote was potent. However, it was completely ineffective against the poison he was plagued with.

The poison which the other party had planted in him had already reached even the most hidden corners of his body, where his zhenqi was incapable of reaching. There was no medicine that could save him anymore.

“Damn it!”

Lu Feng stood up and turned to Zhang Xuan once more. His teeth were gritted so tightly together that it felt as if they would chip off from the sheer pressure between them. “Very well, I acknowledge your capability! However, allow me to offer you a warning. You might have won the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, but You Xu is a 6-star pinnacle physician under the protection of the academy. With your current standing, you have no right to determine his life and death!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

As rude as the other party’s words were, he knew that the other party was right.

If You Xu was an ordinary physician, Zhang Xuan would have killed him without any hesitation. He had the right to do so after winning the Life-and-Death Physician Duel.

However, it was a pity that You Xu wasn’t an ordinary physician... he was also a 6-star pinnacle master teacher as well.

Every single master teacher was a pillar of society, a precious asset of the Master Teacher Pavilion. A huge amount of time, effort, and resources had to be devoted to groom every single 6-star pinnacle master teacher, and the death of any single one of them was a huge loss to society. As a result, unless they were to commit some grievous crime that harmed the interest of humanity, even master teachers of the same rank didn’t have the right to put them to death.

The only way that a 6-star pinnacle master teacher could be killed was under the decree of a 7-star master teacher or above, or a ruling from the Tribunal of Master Teachers.

This was precisely the reason Zhang Xuan had used his Impartation of Heaven’s Will to beguile You Xu into committing suicide instead.

If You Xu had really killed himself, he could pass it off as the other party committing suicide out of shame. There would be no one to testify against him, so he couldn't be charged for it. However, after falling for it once, it would be difficult for him to beguile You Xu into it once again.

"I can spare him, but I will be taking him with me!" Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

If he had succeeded in making You Xu commit suicide, that would have been the end of things. However, since things had reached this point, he decided to take him to Wei Ruyan for her to end him instead.

Firstly, he would be able to gain some time to find a way to circumvent the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and secondly, Wei Ruyan would be able to personally exact vengeance on the man who had killed her father.

"You want to take him with you? You are in the Master Teacher Academy, and you wish to take one of our vice school heads away with you? Don't you think you are being a little too naive?" Lu Feng sneered coldly.

"Are you intending to not abide by the rules of the Life-and-Death Physician Duel?" Zhang Xuan frowned coldly.

"The rules must be abided, but at the end of the duel, you are still a student of the academy. As the stand-in principal of the academy and the leader of the Ten Great Master Teachers, I believe that I am more than qualified to stop a student!" Lu Feng replied with a grand wave of his hands.

While he had infringed on the rules by interfering in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel previously, as the duel had come to an end, the other party's position had reverted back to that of a student. As the stand-in principal of the academy, he possessed the authority to stop or even teach a student of the academy a lesson.

There was no one who could refute that.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan's complexion turned extremely awful.

Lu Feng was right. No matter how he put it, he was still a student of the academy. There was a natural hierarchy between teacher and student, and there was nothing he could do if the other party was intent on stopping him.

As long as he was in the academy, he had to respect the rules of it.

He could use poison to threaten You Xu, but if You Xu were to really die, that would be equivalent to a 4-star master teacher killing a 6-star master teacher—in other words, insubordination. Just by this in itself, he would be subjected to an investigation by the Master Teacher Pavilion.

That would make things troublesome for him.

As expected of a stand-in principal of the academy, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, he was indeed a master at playing by the rules.

“Leave Vice School Head You here and neutralize the poison he is suffering from. For your victory in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, I will compensate him in your stead. At the same time, I will make an exception and overlook this matter, treating it as if nothing has happened. Otherwise, I believe that you should also know that I have the power to teach a student of the academy a lesson. Even if you bring up your grievances to the Master Teacher Pavilion, there is no one who will side with you!” Lu Feng threatened.

“You are really determined to make things difficult for me, aren’t you?” Seeing that Lu Feng was determined to stand in his way, Zhang Xuan’s gaze turned frosty.

There was indeed nothing scarier than a shameless master teacher!

As the saying goes, ‘There is nothing to fear from a hoodlum, what is truly fearsome is a cultured hoodlum’!

“Make things difficult for you? Why would you say such words? I am merely teaching a junior a lesson. If you believe that you are above me in seniority, you are more than free to do so as well!” Lu Feng roared in laughter.

There was an inherent power in seniority.

You are a student; I am a teacher. With just my standing, I can easily force you to lower your head to me!

Trapped in a deadlock, Zhang Xuan racked his brain furiously for a way out, but there was nothing that he could use to turn the tables. Just as he thought that it was the end, he suddenly heard the exclamation of an old man beneath the stage.

“Elder Zheng, Elder Wang, and Elder Liu, you are here! Wait a moment, don’t go up now...”

With a gust of wind, several figures leaped onto the stage.

Following which, a voice with suppressed composure, reminiscent of the calm before a storm, spoke. “School Head Lu, we are the three guest elders that the Martial Arts School invited recently. May I ask if with our standing... can we be considered your peers?”

813 Unfilial Disciple, Hurry Up and Pay Respects to Your Grandteacher!

Hearing that voice, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but turn around, and what he saw left him in a trance.

The three elders who had leaped onto the stage were none other than Zheng Yang, Wang Ying, and Liu Yang.

Weren't those three fellows cultivating in the residence outside the academy? Why were they here?

Furthermore, considering the tight security of the Master Teacher Academy, how did they sneak in without getting caught?

While Zhang Xuan was astonished by the sight before him, Lu Feng also didn't expect the abrupt situation that fell upon him. He pondered for a moment before chuckling softly and replying, "I heard about the three of you from School Head Xu. Despite your young age, you are geniuses among geniuses, possessing extraordinary insight into battle techniques and cultivation. The fact that you were able to win School Head Xu's approval speaks volumes about your capabilities!"

"Since you are the guest elders of the Martial Arts School, you are naturally elders of our Master Teacher Academy as well. Without a doubt, you are my peers!"

The standing of guest elders was higher than that of ordinary elders.

Even though Lu Feng was a school head, in the strictest sense, he was only considered an elder of the academy as well. In other words, despite the age difference between them, the trio were his peers.

"It's good to hear that!" Zheng Yang nodded in satisfaction.

He gestured to the other two, and the three of them turned to Zhang Xuan and kneeled to the ground. “Student Zheng Yang (Wang Ying, Liu Yang) pays respect to teacher!”

“Ah?”

“The three guest elders invited by the Martial Arts School are actually... Zhang shi’s students?”

“If Zhang shi’s students are of the same seniority as School Head Lu, doesn’t that mean that... School Head Lu is lower than him in terms of seniority...”

“Just what is going on?”

...

Not only were the seniors stupefied by the situation before them, the many teachers, elders, and school heads who had gathered in the area were dumbfounded as well.

Many people had heard about the new guest elders recruited by the Martial Arts School, and there were quite a few who had gone to listen to their lessons as well. The three new guest elders might be young, but their understanding of cultivation and battle techniques was truly worthy of respect.

As such, there was no one who had any qualms with their position.

Nearly all of the student populace thought that the reason the trio could achieve such a deep understanding of battle techniques and cultivation was because they had inherited the heritage of some formidable figure in the Master Teacher Continent, but never in their dreams had they expected that... their teacher would be Zhang Xuan!

He was just a freshman, and yet his students had already become elders of the academy...

Just what was with this weird turn of events?

While the others were shocked by the situation before them, on the stage, Lu Feng was on the verge of losing his mind.

It was just a moment ago that he had haughtily said that Zhang Xuan was free to teach him a lesson if the latter’s seniority

was above his, but the next moment... these three appeared.

Going by seniority, if Zhang Xuan was the teacher of the academy's guest elders, wouldn't that mean that Lu Feng would have to call him... uncle?

The thought of that immediately sent a streak of darkness across his face. An extremely stifling sensation gripped his chest, leaving him short of breath.

The hell with this!

If he had known that this would happen, he would have never said that the trio were his peers... But spilt water couldn't be taken back. Since he had already declared it publicly, he couldn't possibly refute what he had just said.

It took a long time before his soul finally returned to him, and he said, "Zhang Xuan might be your teacher, but he is also a student of the academy as well..."

"Since you say that my teacher is a student of the academy, may I ask, who has he acknowledged as his teacher?" Zheng Yang asked.

Lu Feng's face stiffened.

Given the huge ruckus that Zhang Xuan had caused in the academy, as the stand-in principal of the academy, he'd naturally had someone investigate his background. According to what he knew, the other party had gone into a coma during the recruitment period, so he had no teacher at all!

Realizing what Zheng Yang was possibly driving at, Lu Feng replied with an awful complexion, "He didn't acknowledge anyone as his teacher..."

"Then does my teacher have a student token?" Zheng Yang asked.

Lu Feng hesitated once again.

Most students would receive their student tokens straight from their teachers when they acknowledged them. As for those who didn't acknowledge a teacher, they were still allowed to attend open lectures and they would be given the benefit of the doubt to access most facilities in the academy, but the

processing of their student token would be a little more troublesome, requiring at least ten days.

Considering that it was only six days since the start of the semester, it was natural that Zhang Xuan wouldn't have a student token yet!

“Since my teacher doesn't have a student token and he hasn't acknowledged a teacher in the academy, why do you say that he's a student of your Master Teacher Academy? Do you have any proof that he is?” Zheng Yang pressed on.

There was nothing Lu Feng could say to this.

Considering that Zhang Xuan didn't have a student token and hadn't acknowledged any teacher in the academy, even though he was recognized as a student in the academy, there were no official records stating so... If that was the case, it wasn't exactly wrong to say that he wasn't a student of the academy...

Assuming that Zhang Xuan really wasn't a student of the academy but the teacher of guest elders, it would mean that his standing was higher than Lu Feng's. Thus, if Lu Feng dared to hinder his path, that would be a blatant disrespect for his elders, and this was unacceptable for a master teacher!

“Even though he doesn't have a student token, he has a residence in the academy, and he even created a student faction...” Lu Feng argued anxiously.

In the few days since he had entered the academy, that fellow has already caused two schools to collapse and created so much trouble everywhere. Yet, you are telling me that he's not a student... Are you seriously trying to argue that?

If he wasn't a student, he would have long been kicked out from the academy for all he had done! There was no way the academy would condone such actions from unaffiliated personnel.

“Enough, Junior Lu Feng. It's due to the token that School Head Mo gave me that I was able to obtain a residence in the academy, and the reason I established a student faction is due to the overwhelming support that the freshmen showed me. I

don't understand why you are overthinking this matter," Zhang Xuan said.

"I know that it's in consideration of the academy's interests that you want to stop me, and I don't blame you for that. However, it's a fact that You Xu did lose to me in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, so it's my right to take him away. As a junior, you should know better than to hinder me!"

"Jun-Junior?" Hearing the other party's nagging tone, as if a senior trying to persuade a junior not to do the wrong thing, School Head Lu Feng nearly fainted on the spot.

Do you have to rise up to the occasion every single time someone gives you the opportunity to brag?

If someone says that you are the principal, are you going to start acting like you own the academy immediately?

School Head Zhao, School Head Mo, and the others began muttering in disbelief.

"Elder Zheng, Elder Wang, and Elder Liu are actually... Zhang Shi's students?"

"It seems like they are direct disciples at that..."

They had thought that You Xu would surely escape with his life now that School Head Lu was mediating the dispute. But who could have known that three guest elders would suddenly appear at this crucial juncture?

What shook them the most was how Zhang Xuan addressed Lu Feng as his junior... Going by that, wouldn't that mean they were his juniors as well?

Knowing that he would only be cornered if he allowed himself to be swept along at the other party's pace, Lu Feng harrumphed coldly. "Let's just drop the word games here. No matter how you put it, you are only a 4-star master teacher; don't even dream about taking You Xu away today!"

In truth, the matter regarding seniority was indeed very troublesome to iron out. If one were to put it like that, everyone would be everyone's senior in one way or another.

At that moment, an impassive voice suddenly sounded from above.

“Enough, School Head Lu! For a stand-in principal of the Master Teacher Academy to make such a huge fuss like that, don’t you think that’s shameful?”

Everyone lifted their gazes and saw a ravishing figure descending from the sky.

Upon seeing the figure above, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

The person was no other than the beautiful teacher who had captured his heart at first sight, Luo Ruoxin!

“Luo shi!” Upon seeing her, School Head Lu hurriedly clasped his fist and reported, “This matter concerns the dignity of the Master Teacher Academy! If we were to allow an outsider to take away one of our vice school heads, wouldn’t others start to question the authority of the Master Teacher Pavilion? How can we explain this to the headquarters if they question us on this matter?”

A slight frown appeared on Luo Ruoxin’s face as she waved her hands. “That’s not a problem for you to worry about; Mu Yuan will explain it to the headquarters.”

“This... Yes!” Even though School Head Lu was dissatisfied with Luo Ruoxin’s response, he dared not to talk back to her.

Even though the lady before him was young, there was a high chance she was a member from a Sage Clan, the Luo Clan. Even Mu shi had to treat her with the utmost respect, so naturally, he wouldn’t dare challenge her authority.

Seeing Lu Feng backing down on this matter, Luo Ruoxin turned her gaze to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Could it be that... you have comprehended the Eye of Insight?”

Zhang Xuan didn’t expect Luo Ruoxin to ask such a question. He hesitated for a moment before nodding. “I guess you could say so!”

The other party had probably noticed it when he used it in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel against You Xu earlier.

“He has comprehended the Eye of Insight which only 6-star master teachers can comprehend?”

“I heard that it is extremely difficult to comprehend the Eye of Insight, and there are many top-notch geniuses in Sage Clans who spend their lives trying to understand it, only to eventually die in regret. Yet, Zhang Shi has comprehended it?”

“With talent like his, as long as he doesn’t die, he’ll at least become an 8-star master teacher...”

“Indeed! So far, there are only ten people who are recorded to have comprehended the Eye of Insight in the books. Six of them became 9-star master teachers, two of them died a premature death, one of them had his cultivation capped after suffering severe wounds, but nevertheless, he still reached 8-star, and the last one went missing after clearing the 7-star master teacher examination... However, rumor has it that the missing 7-star master teacher was seen exerting might comparable to a 9-star master teacher in a fight against the Otherworldly Demons before passing away. All of these point at one thing—those who have comprehended the Eye of Insight will at least achieve strength equivalent to an 8-star master teacher if they are given time and space to grow!”

“Fearsome...”

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s admittance, a huge uproar broke out amid the crowd.

Even though the Eye of Insight was said to be an ability that 6-star master teachers could awaken, only a small handful of true geniuses had managed to comprehend it.

Yet, Zhang Xuan had actually managed to comprehend it! It was no wonder he possessed exceptional capabilities in smithing, terpsichorean arts, and the Way of Medicine!

His talent was rare even among the offspring of Sage Clans.

“Eye of Insight?” At the same time, upon hearing of the news, Lu Feng’s body trembled uncontrollably in fear.

Even the students beneath the stage knew of the significance of the Eye of Insight, so how could he possibly be unaware of it?

It was definitely no joke to say that the other party's potential was boundless!

To offend such a talent for You Xu... was it really worth it?

It was no wonder Luo Shi chose to side with him instead. Possessing such talent, the other party would surely grow to become one of the powerhouses of the Master Teacher Continent one day. Even those of the Sage Clan would be inclined to build a good relationship with him, not daring to offend him in the least.

"As I expected!" Luo Ruoxin nodded for a moment before abruptly leaping off the stage. For an instant, it felt as if she had come here to stop Lu Feng just so that she could ask this question, but the next moment, her soft voice sounded in his ear.

"I will come and find you tonight!"

Leaving behind those words, she stepped into the crowd, and after a few turns, she abruptly disappeared from sight.

Find me? Zhang Xuan frowned.

Possessing the Library of Heaven's Path, he could easily see through anyone. But for some reason, he was unable to see through Luo Ruoxin.

Forget it!

Knowing that it was impossible for him to fathom the other party's thoughts, and that he would get the answer tonight, Zhang Xuan decided to put the matter aside for the time being.

With Luo Ruoxin speaking up on his behalf, Lu Feng didn't dare stop him any longer. After instructing Zheng Yang to carry the poisoned You Xu, Zhang Xuan stepped off the stage with his students.

With everything that had happened, there was no one who dared to block his path. In an instant, the seniors immediately opened up a way for him to pass.

As Zhang Xuan walked, he couldn't help but shake his head in disappointment. Given the scale of the ruckus he had caused

this time, it would probably be difficult for him to enter the Master Teacher Academy anymore.

Of the ten schools, he had only challenged the Blacksmith School, Terpsichore School, and Physician School so far. There were still seven more to go, and it felt like a huge loss for him to leave just like that.

Looks like I will have to assume the role of a challenger if I wish to return to the academy...

After Zhang Xuan had denied being a student of the academy, there was no way School Head Lu would acknowledge him anymore.

Those who weren't students of the academy possessed no Academic Credits or student tokens, so they weren't able to enter the academy freely, and they weren't allowed to use its facilities or take the examinations here either.

If Zhang Xuan still wished to raise the rank of his supporting occupations to 6-star in Hongyuan City, there was only one way—challenging the schools!

For example, if Zhang Xuan intended to obtain the 6-star apothecary emblem, he could challenge the entire school, and if no one could match up to him, he would naturally be qualified to apply for a 6-star apothecary emblem.

Why is it just so difficult for me to live a quiet and humble life? Zhang Xuan sighed deeply.

He could already foresee the huge chaos he would bring to the Master Teacher Academy should he challenge the schools.

Honestly speaking, all he wanted to do was to be an ordinary student, study in a peaceful environment, and pass his exams with flying colors. Yet... trouble simply had to come knocking on his door.

But since what had happened had happened, he decided to return to his residence and rest for a few days first. If no better solution came to mind by then, he would just have to resort to challenging the schools.

Once he obtained six 6-star supporting occupations, he would be able to take the 6-star master teacher examination.

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan walked toward the entrance of the academy. However, on his way there, he suddenly saw a young man wielding a spear run up to him excitedly and block his way.

“I have finally reached the tenth dan of the Fallen Spear Art, achieving the level of Spear-Man Union! Zhang Xuan, I want to challenge you to a duel. Will you accept the challenge?”

The young man flicked his spear, and a resounding whir reminiscent of the roar of a dragon echoed. In that instant, his figure resembled an undefeatable God of War.

That person was none other than Xue Zhenyang.

After listening to Zheng Yang’s lecture the day before, he had gone into seclusion, and just a few moments ago, he had finally succeeded in breaking through his bottleneck.

After asking around and learning that Zhang Xuan was here, he immediately made his way over.

With his newfound strength, he would cleanse the humiliation he had suffered and reforge the True Helios Faction’s reputation!

Pah!

But before he could even listen to Zhang Xuan’s reply, he suddenly felt someone striking the back of his head forcefully.

He quickly turned around, only to see Zheng Yang laoshi glaring at him with a displeased gaze. “Unfilial disciple, hurry up and pay respects to your grandteacher!”

814 So He Was the One Who Bought the Manor!

Xue Zhenyang fell into a daze. The excited gleam in his eyes slowly transformed into a look of horror. Pointing a finger at Zhang Xuan, his gaze alternated between Zhang Xuan and Zheng Yang, and despair gradually painted his face dark. Unwilling to believe what was happening, he asked doubtfully, “G-g-grandteacher?”

When he’d departed from the True Helios Faction, Zheng Yang and the others hadn’t gotten on the stage yet. As such, he was still unaware of the background of his spearmanship teacher.

However, at this instant, hearing from his teacher’s own mouth that his grandteacher was Zhang Xuan, he suffered a blow so heavy that it threatened to snap his sanity.

When the subordinate he’d sent ended up being taken in by Zhang Xuan instead, the True Helios Faction suffered a heavy blow to its reputation.

In order to exact vengeance, he’d left the academy with a spear in his hands, intending to tour the lands so that he could comprehend the tenth dan of the Fallen Spear Art.

Through surpassing Zhang Xuan in spearmanship, he would bring glory back to the True Helios Faction, sending out the message that he, Xue Zhenyang, was still an irreplaceable genius of the Master Teacher Academy...

After all the effort he had put into it, when his diligence had finally paid off and he had achieved a breakthrough, reality suddenly struck him... Unknowingly, he had become the grandstudent of his nemesis!

The hell!

I don’t want to be that fellow’s grandstudent! I want to surpass him and cleanse the shame I have suffered due to him! I want

to remain the revered genius of the Master Teacher Academy...

Xue Zhenyang howled furiously on the inside. However, before he could sort out his thoughts, excruciating pain assaulted the back of his head once more. His teacher had struck him again.

“Who do you think you are pointing your finger at? Where are your manners? This is the person I have been telling you about, my teacher. What are you waiting for? Hurry up and get on your knees!” Zheng Yang urged with a displeased frown.

He had been wanting to introduce his talented student to his teacher for a while now, but now that the chance finally came, the latter was acting completely disrespectful to his teacher. This was truly... If he had known earlier, he should have taught Xue Zhenyang some etiquette beforehand!

Get on my knees? On the other hand, Xue Zhenyang felt as if someone had just torn his world apart.

All along, due to Zheng Yang and the others' age and astounding capability, he had thought that his grandteacher would be a formidable figure and thus imaged him as an old man in his seventies or eighties...

Yet, it turned out to be the nemesis he had set out to defeat in the first place!

Why did fate have to pull such a prank on him?

Before his departure, he had declared proudly that he would defeat Zhang Xuan upon his return... But how could he do so, given his current identity?!

While Xue Zhenyang was suffering a tragic mental breakdown, Long Cangyue and the others, who were watching the commotion, felt their bodies swaying weakly.

Of the four student faction leaders, two had challenged Zhang Xuan, but one became his apprentice and the other his grandstudent... Their standing was gradually becoming one lower than the other.

“Say, if we challenge him as well... will we end up becoming his grand-grandstudents?” Long Cangyue gulped.

“You must be joking! Grand-grandstudent, that means that his standing is three generations higher than us! But we are the direct disciples of the old principal. If he’s three generations higher than us, wouldn’t that make even the old principal his grandstudent?”

Dong Xin harrumphed coldly. “Don’t put yourself down and inflate his ego!”

“But... there is just something uncanny about that fellow,” Long Cangyue said.

“There’s indeed something weird about him, but... don’t you think that’s what makes this a challenge?” Unlike Long Cangyue’s nervousness, Dong Xin’s eyes were glowing in excitement.

As a genius, she had never submitted to anyone before. Formidable as Zhang Xuan might seem, his capability had only served to further stimulate her fighting will.

“A challenge? Forget it. I fear that my Ashen Moon Faction will disappear after the challenge... If you wish to do so, do it yourself!” Long Cangyue hurriedly shook his head.

You must be joking! Which of the four student factions are weak?

Two had already had their turn, and they ended up in such a miserable state. Even a vice school head was utterly crushed by the other party... He had no desire whatsoever to get himself involved in this matter.

“Forget it! If you are really that scared, I’ll do it alone then! Don’t worry, I’ll surely be able to find his weakness and defeat him!” Dong Xin chuckled as her eyes twinkled in confidence.

There was no such thing as a flawless cultivator in the world. So what if Zhang Xuan was formidable?

She didn’t believe that he could be perfect!

As long as she paid careful attention, she would surely be able to find something to exploit against him.

By then, her Dong Xin Faction would become the academy's largest faction, unmatched by any other!

And finally, after so many years of competing with Hu Yaoyao, she would emerge at the top!

...

“You accepted Xue Zhenyang as your disciple?”

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was gazing at the kneeling Xue Zhenyang before him in a daze.

When did Zheng Yang take this fellow as his disciple? Not to mention, what was with the matter of being the guest elder?

Fearing that Zhang Xuan would get furious, Sun Qiang hurried forward and interjected.

“Young Master, I was the one who convinced Young Master Zheng Yang to do so. I saw that this fellow was sincere and determined in acknowledging Young Master Zheng Yang as his teacher, and he also paid the school fee as well, so I took pity on him...”

Discreetly, he passed a storage ring over and sent a telepathic message. “Here are the spirit stones that Zheng Yang and the others have earned through their lectures!”

“Lecture?” The more Zhang Xuan listened, the more bewildered he became. He immersed his consciousness into his storage ring, and what he saw made him have the shock of his life.

Middle-tier spirit stones stacked as if a mountain! Judging from the size of the pile, there were at least several ten thousand of them in there. Even if he were to exchange them for high-tier spirit stones, he would at least be able to get a hundred of them.

Are you sure you earned this sum by conducting a lecture, not by robbery?

“Indeed. It's actually like this...” Sun Qiang swiftly explained the matter of how Zheng Yang and the others became guest elders of the Martial Arts School to Zhang Xuan.

“To think that such a thing could happen!” Zhang Xuan was astonished by what had happened while he was at the Cloudmist Ridge.

Even though what he had imparted to Zheng Yang and the others were just simplified versions of the Heaven’s Path Divine Art and Heaven’s Path battle techniques, those were already the most profound secret manuals in this world, far surpassing any of their kind.

As master teachers, it was natural that Xue Zhenyang and Xu Changqing would realize how profound they were.

With that, it didn’t come as much of a surprise that they would invite Zheng Yang and the others to become guest elders of the academy.

Sun Qiang couldn’t help but feel a little unnerved by Zhang Xuan’s silence. “Young Master, I’m the one who convinced Zheng Yang and the others into it. If you wish to punish them, please punish me instead...”

He felt that the young master would be moved by the spirit stones, but nevertheless, there was no way he could be certain that he had made the right call.

“Punish? Why would I punish you for this matter? Accepting disciples and imparting knowledge to them, this is a way for them to reinforce their understanding as well!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

Often, just by listening to a lecture, one’s understanding of a subject wouldn’t be complete. However, if one were to attempt to teach it to another, one would be forced to organize their thoughts and sort out the logic regarding it, and this would reinforce one’s understanding of the subject.

As such, it was crucial for students to exchange their knowledge with one another or even serve as the other’s teacher. This was not only beneficial to the other party but oneself as well.

Through the lecture, Zheng Yang and the others should have been able to gain deeper insight into cultivation and battle techniques themselves, and that was surely a good thing!

Besides, it wasn't like he had made a loss because of this matter. With the spirit stones earned, he would have nothing to worry about for the time being!

He was still thinking about selling a portion of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence to tide them over, but it seemed like there was no need for it anymore.

These students of his had truly done something good for him this time around.

Nevertheless, there was still one thing he had to warn them about.

“I don't oppose you becoming the teachers of others. On the contrary, I think it's good for you to impart knowledge to others. However... I will still have to ask you to do it in moderation. Our heritage is grand and profound, so it might bring us trouble instead if you impart too much to others. Living in this world, it's always best to keep a low profile whenever possible. This is a trait that you should learn from me!” Zhang Xuan warned grimly.

The Heaven's Path Divine Art and Heaven's Path battle techniques, even if just the simplified versions, were too powerful; it would definitely cause a huge uproar if their existence were to be made known to others. Perhaps, it might even end up drawing in enemies far too powerful for them to deal with.

Thus... it would still be best for them to keep a low profile.

“Teacher, rest assured. We only lectured them on the bare basics. Regarding those crucial aspects of our heritage, we made sure to leave them out... We have tried our best to keep a low profile as well!” Zheng Yang and the others replied.

“Good!” Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

The few of them didn't speak too loudly, so not many had heard their words. However, Xue Zhenyang, who was just kneeling before them, heard them loud and clear. His body shook frenziedly, and tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

The heck, can we still hold a proper conversation over here?

A twenty-year-old freshman creating a huge storm as soon as he entered the academy, sending all of the seniors into a frenzy...

Three youngsters, only fifteen or sixteen, becoming the guest elders of the Martial Arts School...

How the freaking hell can you call this low profile?

If this is called low profile, what can be considered high profile?

“Alright. Since you have accepted him as your disciple, teach him well. Also, try to conduct a few more lectures in the academy to earn more spirit stones. As you know, we cultivators require a lot of spirit stones to cultivate, so it will be best for us to get as many of those as we can,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

Sun Qiang nodded. “Don’t worry, Young Master. I will make arrangements!”

As he had expected! As long as it came to money, the young master would have no qualms with it.

“Un. For the time being, we should head over to You Xu’s residence to get the Ten-leafed Flower!” Zhang Xuan said.

For the moment, the urgent matter at hand was for him to take the Ten-leafed Flower and save Wei Ruyan.

Other matters could wait, but hers couldn’t. If he didn’t hurry, the latter might just end up succumbing to her illness.

Given that You Xu’s life was in Zhang Xuan’s hands and he had lost in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel as well, he had no choice but to obey Zhang Xuan’s orders. Thus, it didn’t take long for the Ten-leafed Flower to appear in Zhang Xuan’s hands.

After obtaining the medicinal herb, Zhang Xuan headed to his residence in the Elite Sector.

His residence outside was currently too small, so it was extremely inconvenient there. On top of that, the treatment to save Wei Ruyan also required an area with a high

concentration of spiritual energy, and his residence outside clearly couldn't compare to this.

However, when they arrived at Zhang Xuan's residence in the Elite Sector, he saw someone guarding the entrance. It was Huang Xing, Zhou Tong, and the others, the seniors who had allocated the residence to him back then. Stacked beside them were his personal belongings which he had stored inside the residence.

"What is going on?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

"Zhang shi, School Head Lu just passed an order saying that you are prohibited from staying here because you aren't a student of the academy. His authority is higher than that of School Head Mo, so there's nothing we can do about it either... I beg your pardon, Zhang shi," Huang Xing said with a reddened face.

He had also heard of the matter in the Physician School, and honestly speaking, he was filled with respect and admiration for Zhang Xuan's actions as well. However, the person standing on the opposing side was the head of the Apothecary School, the stand-in principal of the Master Teacher Academy. No matter how gutsy he was, he dared not disobey School Head Lu's orders.

Thus, he could only move Zhang Xuan's possessions out of his residence.

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's face turned livid.

He hadn't thought that Lu Feng would act so swiftly!

This residence was built upon a Spirit Gathering Formation, thus resulting in a dense concentration of spiritual energy around it. Such conditions were ideal for the Ten-leafed Flower to nourish Wei Ruyan's soul.

The treatment wouldn't be as effective if he were to conduct it in his residence outside!

However, it was indeed true that he had declared that he wasn't a student of the academy, so he had no right to live there.

What should I do? Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella, troubled.

Resigned, he placed his possessions in his storage ring and prepared to head back to his residence outside. However, at that moment, a middle-aged man, under the lead of a senior, suddenly walked up to him.

“Zhang shi, this man is looking for you!” the senior reported before retreating to the side.

The middle-aged man clasped his fist and asked, “May I confirm that you are Zhang shi?”

Zhang Xuan frowned. “You are...”

“I am the butler of King Huai Manor, Yu Qing. Our master has bought an accommodation for Zhang shi, and it is located just a short distance away from the academy. He tasked me to deliver the deed to you, and I will be grateful if you accept it!” As he spoke, Yu Qing took out a jade box, and opening it, a housing deed and land deed came into sight.

Taking a look at the land deed, Zhang Xuan saw the location written on it and he froze.

“Accommodation... That manor was bought by your master?”

815 Hu Yaoyao's True Identity

Written on the land deed was the specific location of the plot of land, and it was indicating the location of the manor that Hu Yaoyao said was where the old residence of Wu Yangzi used to be situated.

Back then, when he learned that the manor belonged to him, he was extremely perplexed. He racked his mind to figure out who it could be, but never had he thought that it would be King Huai!

He never had any interaction with King Huai, except for the fact that Zheng Yang and the others had stayed in his manor for a few days, and his ambiguous relationship with the Yuan Clan, who had taken Yuan Tao with them.

To be honest, they couldn't even be considered acquaintances, having just met once. Yet, the other party was gifting him a luxurious manor worth more than a hundred high-tier spirit stones?

Wasn't this... a little too much?

But thinking about it carefully, King Huai was indeed the only one who had the financial resources to spare to carry this out.

Even though Mo Gaoyuan, School Head Mo, and others were prestigious 6-star master teachers, their wealth still couldn't be compared to a king who wielded immense power in Hongyuan Empire.

"That's right!" Butler Yu Qing nodded respectfully.

"I don't think I have done anything worthy of this gift from King Huai..." Zhang Xuan shook his head.

As much as he was interested in the manor, he had no ties with King Huai whatsoever. It wasn't really appropriate to accept such a valuable gift from a stranger.

“My master has ordered me to deliver the land deed and housing deed to you regardless of the cost. Otherwise, I might be kicked out of the King Huai Manor or even be severely punished for my lapse in duty!” Yu Qing said anxiously.

“Furthermore, this manor is registered under your name. If you continue to turn me down, I really do not know what I will do with the manor!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had noticed it just now as well. The owner registered on the land deed and housing deed was indeed him.

In other words, King Huai had guessed that he would reject the gift, so he chose to register the manor straight under his name.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan nodded. “Alright, I will accept it then. Sun Qiang, take the jade box. When I am free, I will make sure to pay King Huai a visit so as to express my gratitude!”

It was a fact that he needed a better accommodation at the moment, and Wu Yangzi’s treasure was located within the manor as well. Since the other party was determined to give the manor to him, there was no need for him to refuse it anyway.

At most, he would find an opportunity to offer some guidance to King Huai or resolve the illnesses he was suffering from in order to repay the favor.

Actually, the other party’s intention behind giving him the manor wasn’t too difficult to figure out.

What King Huai was interested in wasn’t him but Yuan Tao.

Yuan Tao possessed the Emperor’s Bloodline. Once he returned to the Yuan Clan, a Sage Clan, the Yuan Clan would surely devote their resources to grooming him. It would just be a matter of time before he became a powerhouse of the Master Teacher Continent.

Considering that he was Yuan Tao’s teacher, it wasn’t too difficult to imagine his standing then.

King Huai might be unable to fawn over Yuan Tao, but if he could get on close terms with him, it would be equivalent to building a connection to the Yuan Clan as well.

Even if Zhang Xuan were to adamantly reject the manor, it was likely that King Huai might still resort to other means to get to him. Since that was the case, he might as well just accept this manor.

“Thank you, Zhang shi!”

Butler Yu Qing had thought that Zhang shi would need some convincing before accepting the manor, but the latter suddenly agreed to it. Excited, he hurriedly passed the housing deed and land deed to Sun Qiang before clasping his fist. “I will be taking my leave then!”

“Un!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands to dismiss the other party.

“Since we have a new residence now, let’s head there!”

Without any hesitation, he left with the others behind him.

“This...”

It was just a moment ago that Huang Xing and the others had stopped Zhang Xuan from entering his old residence in the Elite Sector when King Huai suddenly sent him a massive manor. They glanced at one another with blank looks on their faces, not knowing what to say.

It was clear that School Head Lu had done all of this to humiliate Zhang Xuan, but now... not only was Zhang Xuan not humiliated, he even gave a tight slap back to School Head Lu...

If they were to report this matter to School Head Lu, would the latter fly into a rage and punish them instead?

What the heck was this!

If they had known earlier, they would have never gotten involved in this matter!

...

Oblivious to the woes Huang Xing’s group faced, Zhang Xuan, Sun Qiang, and the others left the academy, and not too

long later, they arrived before a massive manor.

“Young Master...”

Before he could even knock on the doors, ‘jiyaa!’, the doors creaked open, and a huge army of guards and servants rushed out to welcome him.

A butler stepped forward and reported, “King Huai has sent us here out of worry to tend to your needs.”

“I see, help me relay my gratitude to King Huai!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

King Huai had truly put a lot of effort into this matter. Not only did he purchase such a luxurious manor in a prime location, he even refurbished the manor and prepared all of the servants required to manage it.

He sure was generous!

Indeed, it would be difficult for Sun Qiang and the others to tidy up the manor by themselves.

Since he had already accepted the manor, adding a little more to the debt didn’t mean much anymore.

All he had to do was to find a way to return the favor when the time came.

Following the butler into the residence, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but gasp in awe.

It seemed like great care had been taken in the refurbishment as well. The manor was extravagant but not lacking in elegance, magnificent but soothing at the same time.

It was exquisitely designed to harmonize with nature. In an instant, Zhang Xuan felt as if he had walked into a massive park.

It was apparent that a Spirit Gathering Formation had been set up here; the spiritual energy in the manor was extremely dense. In terms of concentration, it was on par even with his residence in the Elite Sector.

“Incredible!” Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

From the looks of it, it seemed like King Huai must have spent a bomb on the refurbishment of the manor as well, perhaps even costing more than the manor itself.

In any case, if Zhang Xuan had bought the manor himself, there was no way he would have been able to make it like that.

Walking into the main hall at the very center of the manor, Zhang Xuan instructed, “Sun Qiang, you shall go with the Great Violetwing Beast to bring Wei Ruyan over!”

“Yes!” Sun Qiang nodded before taking his leave.

After finding a place to keep You Xu locked up, Zhang Xuan took a walk around the manor, and he soon arrived at a flower garden.

He paced around the area a few times before finally taking the Ten-leafed Flower out and planting it in the ground.

This was the area in the manor where the spiritual energy focused. By storing the medicinal herb here, he would be able to maintain its freshness.

After planting it in the ground, Zhang Xuan dripped a few droplets of Earth Vein Spirit Essence on it before heaving a sigh of relief.

In order to have the Ten-leafed Flower nourish Wei Ruyan’s soul, Zhang Xuan had to keep it alive first. Otherwise, if the flower were to wither, the soul that was bound to it would dissipate as well.

In order to ensure that nothing went wrong, Zhang Xuan took out several dozen formation flags from his storage ring and planted them in the area, creating a formation to keep others out.

Only after this was done did Zhang Xuan finally heave a sigh of relief. Just as he was about to return to his room, he suddenly saw Luo Qiqi and Hu Yaoyao walking over.

“Teacher, is this manor really yours?” Even at this point, Luo Qiqi could still hardly believe that it was true.

After all, this place was simply far too extravagant, and it would be no exaggeration to say that it was on par with the

royal palace. To abruptly give such a place to her teacher for no apparent reason, it was normal that she would be skeptical.

Zhang Xuan nodded. "Let's head in to speak!"

Thus, the three of them headed to the main hall.

"Hu Yaoyao, are you certain that this is Elder Wu Yangzi's old residence?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Yes, I am certain!" Hu Yaoyao replied decisively.

Seeing the lack of hesitation in her response, Zhang Xuan frowned.

The reason he and Luo Qiqi were looking for Wu Yangzi's old residence was to obtain the treasure he had hidden. However, this manor had already changed hands several times, and considering the many times it had been refurbished and renovated, probably every inch of ground here had been dug before. Even if there was a treasure here, the chances were that it would have been taken away.

Just as Zhang Xuan was deep in contemplation, Hu Yaoyao suddenly spoke once more. "The reason Zhang Shi is determined to find Elder Wu Yangzi's old residence, if I am not mistaken, is to find the treasure that he left behind, right?"

"Treasure? What treasure?" Zhang Xuan feigned ignorance.

"There's no need for you to hide it from me. There are some members in my Bewitching Devil Faction who are blacksmiths too, and I have heard that the both of you found Elder Wu Yangzi's corpse!" Hu Yaoyao said. "Since you've found Elder Wu Yangzi's corpse, surely you've learned of the existence of his treasure as well!"

"It has been two thousand years since Elder Wu Yangzi disappeared. Even if we managed to find his corpse, he would have already been long dead. How could we possibly receive any clues about his treasure from him..." Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed in disappointment.

"To tell you the truth, I already knew what you two were up to when you asked me about the location of Elder Wu Yangzi's

old residence. It's just that I chose not to point it out since you were unwilling to talk about it!"

Chuckling lightly, Hu Yaoyao returned back to her usual coquettish self and said, "Don't worry. Of the entire Hongyuan City, I am the only one who knows about the treasure that Elder Wu Yangzi left behind. Thus, you need not worry about the news being leaked!"

Since the other party had already brought things out into the light, Zhang Xuan couldn't be bothered to keep up with the disguise anymore. Thus, he turned his gaze to her and asked, "Oh? Since you said so, I would really like to ask you what your relationship with Elder Wu Yangzi is. Why do you know so much about him?"

In the first place, it was already bizarre how certain she was about where Wu Yangzi's old residence had been. But to think that she would know about the existence of the treasure on top of that... This was suspicious.

"You want to know?" Hu Yaoyao smiled. Taking a deep breath, she drove her zhenqi.

Weng!

The next moment, with a jolt, her slender body suddenly emanated a slight glow, and the strength of the aura she exuded surged.

"This is... the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body?" Luo Qiqi exclaimed in shock as she exchanged glances with Zhang Xuan.

No matter how they looked at it, the technique was the secret art they had learned from Wu Yangzi, Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body!

But didn't this physical body cultivation technique go missing long ago?

How did Hu Yaoyao learn it?

Furthermore, from the looks of it, it seemed like she had spent quite some time studying and cultivating it as well, reaching Second Incandescence just like Zhang Xuan.

“Indeed, this is the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body!” Hu Yaoyao nodded as she halted the flow of her zhenqi. “This is a technique I inherited from my ancestor.”

“Your ancestor? Isn’t the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body... Wait, could it be...” Luo Qiqi was astonished.

“In truth, my surname is not Hu but... Wu!” Hu Yaoyao said. “Wu Yangzi is my ancestor!”

“But if you are a descendent of Elder Wu Yangzi, why did you change your surname to Hu?” Zhang Xuan was perplexed.

As a grandmaster blacksmith, Wu Yangzi possessed immense prestige in Hongyuan City. It should have been an honor to have such an ancestor, why would his descendants choose to conceal their heritage instead?

Hu Yaoyao harrumphed coldly. “If we didn’t change our surname, our lineage would have been massacred by others long ago!”

“Massacred?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “But this is where the Master Teacher Academy is located. There are actually people who dare to lay their hands on you?”

With both a Master Teacher Pavilion and Master Teacher Academy taking root here, who would dare to lay their hands on Wu Yangzi’s descendants?

“Dare? Do you really think that it was possible for Wu Yangzi to be kidnapped by others so easily? Not to mention, does it make sense that he didn’t even have a chance to leave a message or call for help?” Hu Yaoyao asked.

“This...”

In truth, Zhang Xuan also felt that there was something amiss with the matter.

Back in the underground chamber, the Otherworldly Demon puppets whom he had faced were all at Saint 1-dan. While they were a formidable force in Hongyuan Empire, it was still nigh impossible for them to deal with a figure who could potentially make the breakthrough to become a 7-star blacksmith so discreetly.

Could there... really be some kind of hidden secret behind this matter?

816 Going to the Apothecary School to Play

As an Upper Nine Paths occupation, the Blacksmith Guild had a strict requirement on the cultivation of its members.

Considering that Wu Yangzi was known to be extremely close to achieving a breakthrough to 7-star, he must have been at Saint 1-dan pinnacle. On top of that, as the greatest blacksmith in Hongyuan Empire's history, he must have possessed a lot of valuable artifacts as well...

Even if School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, School Head Lu, and the others were to gang up against him, it would still have been extremely difficult for them to kill him!

Yet, a bunch of Saint 1-dan Otherworldly Demons actually managed to infiltrate Hongyuan City and captured Wu Yangzi without anyone noticing, imprisoning him until his death. This was unimaginable in itself.

Judging from Hu Yaoyao's tone, it seemed she knew a thing or two about the matter.

It was likely that Wu Yangzi's capture was not as simple as it seemed.

"What happened back then?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"There are too many implications in this matter, and I don't have any concrete evidence either, so I won't talk about it for the moment. The only reason I revealed my identity to you is to earn your trust. If you really are looking for Wu Yangzi's treasure, I might be able to help you!" Hu Yaoyao said.

"Since you are a descendant of Elder Wu Yangzi, there's no need for us to hide this matter from you. You're right, the reason we are looking for his old residence is to find the treasure he has left behind," Zhang Xuan revealed.

"However, the details he left for us are extremely unclear. He only mentioned that he left something behind in his old

residence, but as for what it is and where it is, it isn't clear to us either."

Even though Zhang Xuan admitted it, he didn't tell Hu Yaoyao about the clue to the treasure he had received from the underground chamber.

It was not that he distrusted Hu Yaoyao, but the implications behind this matter were simply too great. Better safe than sorry.

"I have a rough idea of the items he has left behind, but... I have been here many times, and I haven't found any trace of his treasure at all!" Hu Yaoyao said with a doubtful expression.

As Wu Yangzi's descendant, she knew of the existence of Wu Yangzi's treasure. However, the only one who knew where it was buried was Wu Yangzi himself. She had visited this manor many times over the years, hoping to find it, but there was no sign of it anywhere.

"We can take our time. Since this manor is mine now, we can slowly figure out where it is!" Zhang Xuan replied.

Wu Yangzi had said that he had left behind something that could help one reach Sainthood at the Three Stars of the Earth Dragon. As long as one were to place three formation flags according to the three stars, the object would appear automatically.

Zhang Xuan was still unable to figure out what the Three Stars of the Earth Dragon referred to, so he had no idea where to start.

However, with the confirmation of the location of Wu Yangzi's old residence, they had managed to reduce the search perimeter significantly. As long as it was within that manor, they would eventually find it if they were to search carefully.

Most probably, Wu Yangzi's treasure... isn't as simple as to only help one achieve Sainthood! Zhang Xuan thought.

Somehow, he felt that the reason Wu Yangzi's descendants were being hunted down was due to the treasure as well.

Zhang Xuan proceeded to ask Hu Yaoyao a few more questions about Wu Yangzi's old residence, but the manor had gone through far too many hands over the years. It was impossible for anyone to tell what the manor had been like two thousand ago.

“Alright, you should find a place to rest first. I have to treat Wei Ruyan now. We will talk afterward.”

Soon, Sun Qiang and the Great Violetwing Beast returned with Wei Ruyan. Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan rushed over to receive them.

He immediately checked on Wei Ruyan's state. After she was nourished by his soul essence two days ago, her condition had improved significantly. But even so, she was still in a coma at the moment.

He carried her to the area where he had planted the Ten-leafed Flower earlier and began his treatment.

He first drew his soul out, and using a soul art, he transferred her soul into the Ten-leafed Flower. After accomplishing this, he heaved a sigh of relief.

For the time being, he would be leaving Wei Ruyan's soul with the Ten-leafed Flower to allow the latter to nourish her. This process would require at least three days.

After which, Zhang Xuan took out the Earth Vein Spirit Essence to nourish Wei Ruyan's body as well, but a moment later, a deep frown appeared on his face.

It seems that the most the Earth Vein Spirit Essence can do is to maintain her current physical condition. If I wish to restore vitality to her body, I will need the Grand Intermittence Pill!

The Grand Intermittence Pill was a grade-7 pill. Given Zhang Xuan's current capability, it would be impossible for him to have it forged.

Furthermore, he didn't have the pill formula nor the medicinal herbs required for it.

“It seems like I will have to pay the Apothecary School a visit...” Zhang Xuan muttered under his breath.

To have the Grand Intermittence Pill forged, he would have to first raise his pill forging skills to that of a 6-star pinnacle apothecary. Following which, he would have to apply for the pill formula of the Grand Intermittence Pill from the headquarters, purchase the necessary ingredients, and finally, find a 6-star pinnacle apothecary to forge it in his stead...

There's still some time before nightfall... I'll just make a quick trip there then!

It was barely dawn when Zhang Xuan had returned to the academy from the Cloudmist Ridge. After which, despite breaking many records in the Physician School and clearing the 6-star physician examination, it had only taken him around thirty minutes in total for that, and the Life-and-Death Physician Duel with You Xu had taken another thirty minutes, too.

Following which, the procuring of the Ten-leafed Flower, obtaining the housing deed and land deed to the manor, moving into the manor... Even after everything was done, it was also only barely noon. There was still some time before the appointment he had made with Luo Ruoxin at night.

As the saying goes, 'vengeance in the moment'. Since he had said that he would pay a visit to the Apothecary School and he happened to have the time for it now, wouldn't it only be right for him to head there?

After all, he was a master teacher.

How could he break his promise?

...

In a vast room within the Apothecary School sat a livid-faced Lu Feng.

In front of him were four other elders gathered around a table.

"The reason I gathered all of you here is to discuss how we can save You Xu!" Lu Feng said gravely.

"School head, it's You Xu's own fault for getting into such a plight. A master teacher should honor his promises. Yet, You Xu reneged on his promise and even willfully caused the death

of a Saint. This is more than enough to have him sentenced in the Tribunal of Master Teacher!”

One of the elders shook his head and sighed. “Furthermore, he lost to another in a fair Life-and-Death Physician Duel. Even if we wish to save him, there is no legitimate pretext we can use. If I may... I think it would be in our best interest to drop the matter!”

If Zhang Xuan were here, he would surely be able to recognize the other party as Vice School Head Zhou Qing.

He was the one who had helped Luo Ruoxin to clean her podium when she conducted her public lecture back then.

“Drop the matter? You must be joking! If not for You Xu contributing the saint herbs he had been cultivating to us, do you think that you would have been able to forge a 6-star pinnacle pill? Do you think that you would have been able to make such rapid progress in your pill forging skills over the years?” an elder interjected furiously.

“Indeed! Our Apothecary School is indebted to You Xu. We can’t allow him to be taken away just like that, especially not by a student!” another elder added.

“We have to deal with this matter sternly. Otherwise, if we allow students to act as they please, what will become of our Master Teacher Academy?” the last elder said.

Just like most of the schools, the Apothecary School had four vice school heads as well.

“I know that all of us are indebted to You Xu, but... the one who is at fault for this matter is him. On top of that, the other party followed the rules and went by the official procedure, such that even the Physician School has no objection to it. If we were to interfere in this matter any further, I fear that others might say that we are narrow-minded!” Zhou Qing frowned.

“Narrow-minded? Humph! That fellow has no respect for his elders at all, putting down the school head in public. If we don’t teach him a lesson, won’t others start going over our heads as well?” the first elder harrumphed.

“But it is the school head who interfered in the duel fir...”
Vice School Head Zhou frowned, but before he could finish his words, Lu Feng abruptly slammed his palm on the table.

“Enough! The reason I gathered all of you is to discuss how we should resolve this matter, not to bicker with one another!”
Lu Feng roared.

At this moment, he was still feeling extremely frustrated inside.

Despite being the stand-in principal of the Master Teacher Academy, he was snubbed by a twenty-year-old fellow in public and left in a tough spot. Just recalling the matter left rage boiling within him.

“That Zhang Xuan has been causing trouble all around ever since he enrolled at the Master Teacher Academy. No matter how talented he is, the Master Teacher Academy will not tolerate a student who attempts to undermine its authority!”
School Head Lu Feng waved his hands grandly.

“Besides, in the Physician School, he has already publicly acknowledged that he isn’t a student of the academy. Thus, I have sent men to clear away his stuff from his residence in the Elite Sector, disallowing him from taking even a single step into the residence anymore!”

“This...”

Vice School Head Zhou was slightly worried by Lu Feng’s extreme actions. “School head, no matter what, Zhang Xuan has School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and School Head Wei’s backing. If you do this... won’t you draw their discontent?”

Even if Zhang Xuan wasn’t a student of the academy, as a person favored by the school heads, it was nothing much for him to possess a residence in the Master Teacher Academy. To kick him away like that, that was equivalent to provoking the three school heads as well!

“Discontent? I am operating by the rules of the academy, what do they have to be discontented about?” Lu Feng sneered coldly. “The residences in the vicinity of the academy are

extremely expensive. Let's see where he can go after he gets kicked out!"

Vice School Head Zhou shook his head, disagreeing with Lu Feng's decision. He was going to persuade Lu Feng against it once again when someone knocked on the door outside.

"School Head Lu, Grade-2 student Huang Xing seeks an audience!"

"Come in!" Upon hearing that it was Huang Xing, who was in charge of managing the Elite Sector, outside, Lu Feng gave him permission to enter.

Upon stepping into the room, Huang Xing was shocked to see that the school head and the four vice school heads were all present in the room, and he hurriedly clasped his fist to greet them. "Huang Xing pays respect to School Head Lu and the vice school heads!"

"So, how did the matter which I entrusted you with go?" Lu Feng asked.

Huang Xing twitched for a brief instant before he swiftly replied, "Reporting to School Head Lu, I have cleared out Zhang Shi's belongings from the residence and taken back possession of it..."

"Well done!" Lu Feng stroked his beard as he nodded in satisfaction.

A freshman actually tried to go head-to-head with him?
Arrogant!

Even though Lu Feng couldn't make a move on Zhang Xuan personally in consideration of his identity as a master teacher, given the prestige he had accumulated in both the Master Teacher Academy and Hongyuan City over the years, it was still a piece of cake for him to make the life of a mere student a living hell.

"How is he faring? Is he searching anxiously for lodging? Tell the realtor agencies that no one is to rent or sell any property to him, or else I will get even with the organization personally!" Lu Feng said.

“This...” Huang Xing hesitated for an instant before replying.
“Reporting to School Head Lu, he... isn't looking for lodging!”

“He isn't looking for a lodging? Could he still be hanging around the Elite Sector, refusing to leave?” Lu Feng frowned.

“That's not it... When Zhang shi came to collect his belongings, King Huai's butler arrived and gifted him a massive manor which spans over three hundred mu in area. Its interior design is also grand and beautiful, reminiscent of the royal palace... So, he moved in there!” Huang Xing said with a flushed face.

“King Huai... gifted him a manor?” Lu Feng widened his eyes in shock.

It was just a moment ago that he'd had the other party kicked from his residence, and now the other party had been given an extravagant manor... Was this for real?

“Yes...” Huang Xing replied nervously.

Even though he was afraid to say it, this was simply the truth... Not only was School Head Lu's action of kicking the other party out of his residence completely ineffective, it had also made a complete enemy out of the other party.

With a livid face, Lu Feng was just about to ask for more details when a young man abruptly barged into the room.

“Teacher, bad news!”

The young man who barged in was Lu Feng's direct disciple.

Seeing the fluster on his direct disciple's face, Lu Feng frowned. “What's wrong?”

“It's Zhang Xuan! H-h-he's come to our Apothecary School!” the young man yelled anxiously. 300 mu = 200,000 square meters

817 The Exodus

“He’s come to the Apothecary School?” School Head Lu was taken aback for a brief moment before narrowing his eyes. “He is no longer a student of the academy, why didn’t anyone stop him?”

Considering that Zhang Xuan was no longer a student of the academy, how could he be allowed to enter the premises of the academy as he pleased?

“He possesses the personal tokens of School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and School Head Wei. On top of that, he’s also the teacher of three guest elders, so his seniority is higher than even teacher’s... We weren’t able to stop him!” The young man’s face turned crimson.

It was not as if the Master Teacher Academy was some forbidden land exclusive to only students and teachers. Furthermore, the other party had the personal tokens of three school heads, so how could they stop him?

“What is he doing at the Apothecary School?” Lu Feng asked with an awful complexion.

What the other party said was true. Putting aside the students, even he didn’t have the official authority to hinder Zhang Xuan from going to the Apothecary School.

“I’m not too sure either. As soon as he arrived in the Apothecary School, he headed straight for the library,” the young man said.

“The library?” Lu Feng frowned. “But he doesn’t have a student token on him, what is he doing there?”

To enter the library, there were two things that one needed—a student token and Academic Credits. After clearing the Wall of Dilemma, Zhang Xuan had no lack of Academic Credits. However, without a student token, he couldn’t be considered a student of the academy, so naturally, he wasn’t allowed to use their facilities!

“He stopped right before the entrance of the library and went into a... daze...” At this point, a bizarre expression surfaced on the young man’s face.

“Went into a daze?” Lu Feng and the other vice school heads were dumbstruck by what they heard.

He specially made the trip into the Apothecary School just to stand in a daze before their library?

“That’s right. He stood there completely motionless, speaking not a single word, his eyes fixated on the library,” the young man replied.

School Head Lu and the four vice school heads blinked blankly.

They were wondering what the fellow could be up to, coming to the Apothecary School, but to think that he would go into a daze... What the heck?

“Is he still there?” Lu Feng asked.

“He was still there when I left. It has been around an hour since then!” the young man replied.

Upon hearing that Zhang Xuan was there, Lu Feng was stunned for a moment. No matter how he thought about it, it felt that there was something wrong with the matter, so he stood up.

“That fellow caused the collapse of the Passageway of Records in the Blacksmith School and the Tower of Physicians in the Physician School... I think that he’s up to no good here too. Follow me to take a look!”

Even though he had only met Zhang Xuan once, he still remembered how tenacious Zhang Xuan had been when he cornered him on the stage.

Furthermore, Zhang Xuan had also threatened to challenge the Apothecary School back then as well. For some reason, he felt extremely unnerved, and his heart simply wouldn’t calm down. The only way he could ease his mind was to take a look personally.

“Yes!”

Recalling the various deeds that Zhang shi had done in the past, the mouths of the four vice school heads also twitched as well, and they hurriedly got to their feet.

In truth, when they heard about how Zhang Xuan wreaked havoc in other schools previously, they had even gloated over it. But now that it was happening to their own school, they couldn't help but feel as if peril was right behind them, and it left them fidgety.

They immediately rushed off to the library at top speed, and it took them less than ten minutes to arrive at their destination.

The library looked no different from before, towering and majestic. It didn't seem as if it was damaged in the least, and Zhang Xuan was nowhere to be seen either. Perplexed, Lu Feng turned to the student and asked, "Where is he?"

"I have no idea... He was definitely here just now!" the young man said in confusion as he raised his finger and pointed to a specific spot.

That fellow had been standing in a daze in front of the library for some time before he felt that something was amiss and went to look for the school head. Why did he suddenly disappear from there?

But one thing noteworthy about the surroundings was that, perhaps drawn here by Zhang Xuan's reputation, quite a crowd had gathered.

"Wait a moment, I will find someone to ask!" After scanning the surroundings and seeing that Zhang Xuan was nowhere in sight, the young man walked toward the small shack beside the library entrance.

That was where the few Grade-3 students in charge of looking after the library stayed.

But before the young man even reached the shack, 'jiya!', the shack doors opened, and two young men walked out.

Recognizing one of the duo, the young man called out.

"Hu Xu..."

“Senior Lu Hui!” Hu Xu clasped his fist and returned the greeting.

Seeing that the duo was carrying their luggage with them, Lu Hui asked bewilderedly, “Where are you two going?”

Students working as the library guards were expected to stay in the shack for the entire semester in order to take care of it around the clock. It was just a few days since the start of the semester, but why were they both carrying their luggage out of the shack?

“Reporting to senior, we have just listened to Zhang shi’s lecture, and his words have enlightened us. We feel that we aren’t suited to studying pill forging, so... we have decided to leave the Apothecary School and study another occupation instead!” Hu Xu reported.

“Lecture?” Lu Hui widened his eyes upon hearing those words.

Lu Feng and the others couldn’t help but turn their gazes over as well.

That fellow... was lecturing here?

With a bitter smile, Hu Xu said with a depressed look, “Yes. After standing in a daze for a moment, Zhang shi began to lecture us. I was one of the fortunate few who happened to hear it, and it was only then that I realized that even though apothecary is ranked at the top of the Upper Nine Paths, an extremely prestigious occupation, I am simply not suited for it. All those years I have spent studying the art of pill forging, they were all in vain...”

Zhang shi’s lecture was comprehensive and profound, and all who had listened to it had benefitted greatly from it.

Although Hu Xu had studied pill forging for some time, the lecture had made him realize that he was simply not suited to be an apothecary.

Even if he were to attempt to force his way through, the mismatch in his aptitude would make it an uphill battle, and eventually, he would only reach a bottleneck.

Rather than suffer on but achieve nothing in the end, it would be much better for him to let go.

In any case, there were nine supporting occupations in the Master Teacher Academy. Even if he didn't study pill forging, there were still others he could explore. Surely, there would be one that would be aligned with his aptitude.

Hearing Hu Xu's words, Lu Hui couldn't help but ask the other Grade-3 student standing beside him, "You also don't think that you are suited for pill forging?"

"That's right, I also don't think that I am suited either. Farewell, senior!"

Leaving those words behind, they turned around and left.

"This..."

With their departure, there would be no one to guard the library anymore. The school head and the four vice school heads glanced at one another with a slightly troubled look, seemingly at a loss about what to do.

However, the worst had yet to come.

The next moment, a few more students walked over, and just like Hu Xu and the student beside him just now, they were carrying baggage with them as well.

Taking a closer look at their faces, one of the vice school heads exclaimed in surprise, "Vice School Head Wei, aren't those... your students?"

Occasionally, the school heads and vice school heads of the Master Teacher Academy would take in some students under their tutelage as well, just like how Wei Ranxue took in Hu Yaoyao.

Recognizing them, Vice School Head Wei replied, "Yes, they are indeed my students, Shu Yongning and the others!"

"But they are carrying their luggage... Could it be that they don't think that they are suited for pill forging, too?" The mouth of the other vice school head twitched.

“How is that possible?!” Vice School Head Wei exclaimed.
“Shu Yongning might not be the most talented apothecary among the students under me, but he definitely ranks among the top few. His aptitude for pill forging is extremely high, and it’s only a matter of time before he becomes a 6-star apothecary. How can he possibly be unsuited for pill forging?”

Shu Yongning was one of his most outstanding students. If even he was unsuited for pill forging, who else would be?

“Then, he...” the other vice school head asked doubtfully.

For him to be carrying his luggage, it seemed he had the same intention as Hu Xu as well. If he wasn’t intending to leave the Apothecary School, what else could he be up to then?

“I’ll go ask him!” With a livid expression, Vice School Head Wei harrumphed and stepped forward.

However, at that moment, Shu Yongning seemed to have noticed him and rushed forward to greet him.

“Teacher!” Shu Yongning clasped his fist.

“What happened?” Vice School Head Wei asked with narrowed eyes.

“Reporting to teacher, I... am here to bid you farewell!” Shu Yongning suddenly got to his knees and lowered his head in shame.

“Bid me farewell? Could it be that you found that you are unsuited to be an apothecary, too?” Hearing those words, Vice School Head Wei felt so furious that he could burst into flames on the spot.

“Of course not! It’s just that... I don’t think that I am suited for teacher’s lessons, and it will be difficult for me to make substantial improvement under your tutelage. Thus, I don’t wish for you to waste your precious time on me, so I’ve decided to bid you farewell...” Shu Yongning spoke hesitantly. Flicking his wrist, he took out the other party’s tutelage token and handed it back.

Just as teachers could choose their students, students could choose their teachers. This was a two-way relationship.

“My lessons... are not suited for you?” Vice School Head Wei was stunned.

He was the vice head of the Apothecary School, a 6-star pinnacle apothecary, and his knowledge of pill forging was only beneath School Head Lu Feng’s by a notch.

Yet, this fellow actually wanted to withdraw from his tutelage...

“Yes. After hearing Zhang shi’s lecture, I finally understand what pill forging truly means. Even though teacher’s lessons are impressive as well... I find Zhang shi’s teachings are far more impactful and profound. Thus, I intend to join the Xuanxuan Faction to pursue Zhang shi... I am truly sorry, and I beg for teacher’s understanding!”

After placing the tutelage token back into the shocked Vice School Head Wei’s hands, Shu Yongning stood up, turned around, and left.

“ ... ”

Vice School Head Wei was completely stunned. His face was twitching non-stop, and he felt as if he was going to lose his sanity soon.

To think that someone would actually withdraw from the lesson of a 6-star pinnacle apothecary like him... Not to mention, the reason was that his lessons were inferior to a freshman’s...

The hell!

This was a severe slap right to his face!

“Teacher, we are also here to withdraw from your tutelage. Please forgive us!”

“Zhang shi’s lecture was a true eye-opener. It was only a short lecture, but it made me realize that only through pursuing him will I be able to make greater progress as an apothecary...”

...

Before Vice School Head Wei could recover from the primary shock, the other students who were with Shu Yongning

hurriedly rushed forward and passed their tutelage tokens back as well.

Previously, every single one of them had worked extremely hard to get into his lessons, and they had celebrated for three days and three nights when they succeeded. They had viewed it as a great honor, and they'd gone around the Apothecary School bragging about it before others. Yet, at this very moment, they were withdrawing from his tutelage, and judging from their expressions, it seemed like they were even fearful that he would deny them of their freedom!

Vice School Head Wei couldn't help but feel extremely stifled within.

“Something is wrong here!”

Watching how the students left with a delighted look on their faces after withdrawing from their tutelage, School Head Lu's mouth twitched. He walked up to Vice School Head Wei and asked, “For so many students to withdraw from the lesson at once, could it be that there is something wrong with your lessons and Zhang Xuan managed to grab onto that and exploit it?”

There was only one reason for such an exodus of students—something was wrong with the teacher's lessons!

If that was the case, not only would the teacher's reputation be soiled, the prestige of the entire school would plummet as well!

The main reason the Apothecary School was able to become the number one school of the Master Teacher Academy was due to the overwhelming number of students under them, numbering over sixty thousand... But if a huge number of students were to withdraw from their lessons at once, their position as the number one school would be threatened.

Seeing that School Head Lu was doubting his teaching capability, a bitter smile appeared on Vice School Head Wei's face. “I... don't think that there's any problem with my lessons...”

He always designed his lessons in a way such that it abided by the conventions of the Apothecary Guild. While they weren't outstanding, there was no particularly glaring mistake with them either. Just what kind of problem could have happened for so many students to withdraw from his tutelage after listening to a lecture from Zhang Xuan?

"Then what other reason could there be?" Lu Feng frowned.

Just as he was about to continue on, another group of students suddenly appeared and rushed up to them.

"School Head, they seem to be your students," Vice School Head Wei remarked.

School Head Lu nodded in response.

Just like Lu Hui, these students were under his tutelage, and he had already taught them for several years.

"Don't worry, I have confidence in my lessons. My students can't possibly withdraw from my tutelage like yours! Most probably, they are just here to report to me with news on Zhang Xuan," School Head Lu said assuredly.

But just as he was about to ask the group what they were there for, they abruptly knelt onto the floor simultaneously.

"Teacher, we are thankful for your guidance over the years. However, we would like to... withdraw from your tutelage!"

818 Even “They” Have Fled

In that instant, Lu Feng’s body swayed weakly from side to side.

It was just a moment ago that he had declared his confidence in his lessons, but then these fellows said that they would like to withdraw from his tutelage.

Must you really slap my face like that?

Suppressing his overwhelming rage, School Head Lu asked hoarsely, “Why?”

One of the students hesitated for a moment before speaking. “Reporting to teacher, after listening to Zhang shi’s lecture, we feel like we have squandered the past few years of our lives learning pill forging. Thus, we hope that you can let us go! Even though we are withdrawing from your tutelage, you will forever be our teacher in our hearts. We will never show the slightest disrespect to you!”

If there’s no comparison, there’s no damage.

It was only after hearing Zhang shi’s lecture that they finally understood what pill forging truly was and how many detours they had taken under School Head Lu’s tutelage!

If they had learned from Zhang shi from the very start, they would have definitely already become a 6-star apothecary or even higher by now!

They knew full well that withdrawing from their teacher’s tutelage would sully his reputation, but for their own futures, they had no other choice.

Just like how teachers could choose their students, students could choose their own teachers as well. Even if they had already acknowledged Lu Feng as their teacher, they still had the freedom to withdraw from his tutelage. After all, they were just ordinary students, not direct disciples.

Squandered the past few years of your lives... School Head Lu staggered, and he felt a crushing pressure on his chest. For a moment, he found himself unable to catch his breath.

To think that he, the head of the Apothecary School, as well as the most formidable master apothecary in Hongyuan Empire, would have his lessons described to be... squandering one's life away!

Argh, my heart and my lungs...

Just what did that fellow say for all of you to be so mesmerized and impressed by him?

With a livid expression, Lu Feng dripped a drop of blood on their tutelage tokens as he said, "Fine, I will allow you to withdraw from my tutelage as long as you tell me where Zhang Xuan is!"

His students had already spoken such words. It would only further his humiliation if he were to attempt to retain his students after all of that!

The student pondered for a moment before replying. "After Zhang Shi finished his lecture, he headed to the Apothecary Pavilion... It seems he intends to take the 6-star apothecary examination!"

"Apothecary Pavilion?" Ignoring those fellows who had just withdrawn from his tutelage, School Head Lu turned around and beckoned the others. "Let's go and take a look!"

Similar to the Tower of Physicians, the Apothecary Pavilion was a place where apothecaries could interact with one another and take their examinations. There were also all kinds of tests that one could take there.

Leaving Lu Hui behind to guard the library temporarily, Lu Feng and the other vice school heads hurriedly proceeded forward.

Just like the Tower of Physicians, the Apothecary Pavilion was also an extremely tall building, as well as the landmark of the Apothecary School.

Seeing that the Apothecary Pavilion was still standing tall and grand, the group heaved a sigh of relief.

Judging from Zhang Xuan's past history of bringing forth destruction, even Lu Feng couldn't help but feel a little fearful.

Entering the Apothecary Pavilion, there was a huge crowd selling and purchasing pills and looking for pill forging services, as per usual. There didn't seem to be anything out of ordinary.

"Did he not come here?" The school head and vice school heads glanced at one another in confusion.

They had long heard of what had happened to the Tower of Physicians. Wherever Zhang Xuan appeared, destruction and catastrophe followed. If he was truly here, how could everything still be intact?

This didn't make sense!

"Let me ask around!"

After a moment of hesitation, Vice School Head Wei stepped forward and stopped a student. "Student, was there anything... weird that happened here?"

"Vice School Head Wei!"

Recognizing the other party, the student leaped in shock. She pondered for a moment before hurriedly replying, "No, nothing happened at all!"

"Nothing happened at all?"

Vice School Head Wei gazed at the student's face intently for a moment before waving his hands. "I see. You may go!"

"Yes!" The student hurriedly left.

After which, Vice School Head Wei proceeded to ask a few more students, but they gave the same response as well. Having confirmed that nothing had happened, he returned back to a group with a relieved smile on his face.

"It seems like our worry is unfounded. No matter how formidable he is, that Zhang Xuan is still only a twenty-year-old lad. Since he already possesses a profound understanding

in the Way of Medicine and smithing, it would be asking too much for him to be skilled in pill forging as well. Perhaps it might be something else that led to the students before withdrawing from the school...”

“Let’s hope that’s the case!” School Head Lu nodded with an uneasy smile.

Even though nothing had happened, he still had an ominous premonition.

If it was so easy to deal with that fellow, he wouldn’t have been so troubled over this matter.

“Let’s head to the 6-star apothecary examination Apothecary Forge to take a look,” School Head Lu said.

The group headed to the upper levels of the Apothecary Pavilion, where the Apothecary Forges for the apothecary examinations were located. However, the examination area was extremely peaceful. It didn’t seem like anything had happened here at all.

Thus, they called the teacher in charge of managing the Apothecary Forges over.

“Did anyone come over to take the apothecary examination earlier?” Lu Feng asked.

“No one at all! I have been here since morning, and I haven’t seen anyone here!” The teacher shook his head doubtfully, not sure why School Head Lu would ask such a question.

“No one at all?” Lu Feng was still slightly doubtful.

His students had clearly told him that Zhang Xuan had headed here to take the 6-star examination, but why wasn’t he in the Apothecary Forges then?

“No one at all. If school head still doesn’t believe me, I have the records here...” Noticing the slightly peculiar state the school head was in, the teacher hurriedly handed over a book recording the students taking the apothecary examination.

School Head Lu took the book and confirmed that no one had been there since the morning. He traded glances with the other vice school heads, and they heaved a sigh of relief together.

It seemed like Vice School Head Wei was right. As talented as that fellow was, he couldn't possibly be that skilled in pill forging as well.

After all, each human had their own strengths and weaknesses. If a human were to be that talented in all aspects, he wouldn't be a human but god!

"It seems I really worried over nothing this time around... Alright, there's nothing else; you can return to your station now. However, if a twenty-year-old young man comes here, make sure to report the matter to me immediately!" School Head Lu instructed.

"Yes!" the teacher replied. At that moment, another thought suddenly struck him, and he asked, "School head, I suddenly remembered something. Other than taking the examination here, it's also possible to take the 6-star apothecary examination at the Ancestral Hall as well!"

"Ancestral Hall? Impossible! The Ancestral Hall is prepared solely for students who intend to challenge the Pill Debate, but it's not like you are unaware of how difficult it is. Even I can't say with absolute confidence that I would be able to pass a 6-star Pill Debate! Why would anyone go through that additional effort for it when there is an easier way?" Lu Feng shook his head.

There were two formats for apothecary examinations.

One of them was to forge a pill with a grade corresponding to the rank which the apothecary was intending to advance to. For example, to clear a 6-star apothecary examination, one had to successfully forge a grade-6 pill.

As for the other format, it was the Pill Debate.

The Pill Debate was conducted in the Ancestral Hall. The Ancestral Hall had a Communication Wall linked to the Apothecary Guild headquarters, and the headquarters would dispatch 6-star pinnacle apothecaries to conduct the examination. These apothecaries would raise questions in order to verify the examinee's comprehension of pill forging,

and the examinee had to answer every single question without making the slightest mistake.

However, the 6-star pinnacle apothecaries in the headquarters possessed a far deeper understanding of pills than those in the branches due to their association with higher ranked apothecaries. To answer their questions without making the slightest mistake... nigh impossible!

Putting aside the fact that Zhang Xuan was only a twenty-year-old lad, even a veteran with eight hundred years of experience like him couldn't hope to succeed in a Pill Debate!

As a result, almost all apothecaries would opt for the easier pill forging examination rather than the nearly impossible Pill Debate.

“That’s true...” Understanding the logic behind it, the teacher nodded in agreement.

“But regardless of the case, I think that we should still head to the Ancestral Hall to take a look...” Vice School Head Wei interjected.

“Un!”

Since they were already there, they might as well check on the Ancestral Hall as well to bring them peace of mind. Lu Feng emphasized for the teacher to keep a tight watch over the Apothecary Forges once again before heading to the Ancestral Hall with the group.

The Ancestral Hall was located in the vicinity of the Apothecary Forges, so it didn't take too long for them to arrive there.

Just like the Apothecary Forges, the Ancestral Hall was extremely quiet as well. As there were nearly no students who would attempt the Pill Debate, the Apothecary School also didn't bother dispatching anyone to look after the premises.

The group entered the grounds, but the area looked exactly how they remembered it to be. It didn't seem like anything had happened there.

“It doesn’t seem like anyone has been here...” Vice School Head Wei heaved a sigh of relief.

As long as the Ancestral Hall was still standing, it should mean that that fellow hadn’t been there, and there was no problem whatsoever, so they need not worry about the matter.

However, the next moment, Vice School Head Zhou suddenly widened his eyes and exclaimed, “No, something is wrong!”

“What is wrong? The Communication Walls and the other items are completely undamaged...” Vice School Head Wei asked doubtfully.

There were ten massive Communication Walls erected in the Ancestral Hall, and all of them were undamaged. It didn’t seem like Zhang Xuan had come here at all.

“The Communication Walls might be fine, but look at the Communication Jade Screen in front!” Vice School Head Zhou pointed.

Everyone hurriedly turned their gazes over as well.

As well as the Communication Walls, there was also a Communication Jade Screen in the Ancestral Hall. The former was to relay messages to 6-star apothecaries in the headquarters while the latter could establish communication with 7-star apothecaries in the headquarters.

At the moment, there was still a slight glow on the Communication Jade Token, and it was a little warm to the touch as well. It seemed like someone had just used it.

“Someone used the Communication Jade Screen? Could it be that... Zhang Xuan didn’t establish communication with the 6-star apothecaries but the 7-star apothecaries instead?”

“Impossible! Is he intending to take the 7-star apothecary Pill Debate examination?”

“It’s questionable whether he can pass the 6-star apothecary Pill Debate examination or not! To take the 7-star apothecary Pill Debate examination...”

Lu Feng, Vice School Head Wei, and the others shook their heads in disagreement.

How could it be possible for a twenty-year-old freshman of the Master Teacher Academy to take the 7-star apothecary examination?

After a moment of silence, a vice school head suddenly spoke up. “He’s probably here to request a grade-7 pill formula!”

There could only be two possibilities where one would need to activate the Communication Jade Screen. One, to take the 7-star apothecary examination. Two, to request a grade-7 pill formula from the headquarters.

“But regardless of what it is, one has to use ten different grade-6 pills as a deposit in order to activate the Communication Jade Token. Where did the fellow find so many grade-6 pills?” one of the vice school heads asked.

7-star apothecaries were extremely busy. They weren’t figures whom one could meet just because they wanted to.

As such, one had to compensate the 7-star apothecaries duly for their time, and that was through grade-6 pills.

Only if one could take out ten different grade-6 pills could one activate the Communication Jade Screen. It was due to this rule that there had rarely been anyone who had established communication with a 7-star apothecary ever since the Ancestral Hall was built.

It wasn’t that no one dared to reach out to them, but... the price was simply far too heavy!

No matter how talented Zhang Xuan might be, he was only a twenty-year-old young man. It was already extremely difficult for him to even buy a residence; how could he possibly be able to take out ten different grade-6 pills at once?

“But... it is clear that the Communication Jade Screen was activated just a moment ago. This shows that someone did communicate with a 7-star apothecary,” Vice School Head Zhou said.

Even though it was hard to believe, it was a fact that the Communication Jade Screen had been activated just a moment ago. There was no doubt about this.

“Could it be...”

At that a moment, Lu Feng suddenly thought of something and his eyes narrowed. Just as he was about to speak, a figure abruptly rushed into the room.

“School Head Lu! School Head Lu! Bad news!”

The person who arrived was a familiar middle-aged man in his forties. It was the teacher who was in charge of the Pill Chamber.

“What’s wrong?” Lu Feng’s eyebrows shot up upon seeing the other party’s anxious state.

“The grade-6 pills forged by School Head Lu, the vice school heads, and the teachers of the Apothecary School that are stored in the Pill Chamber have... have...” The middle-aged man looked as if he had seen a ghost, and his lips couldn’t stop quivering.

“What’s wrong with the pills?” Vice School Head Wei asked anxiously as the other party stuttered at the crucial point.

With a tearful face, the middle-aged man exclaimed, “The pills have escaped!”

819 Lu Feng's Frenzy

“The pills have escaped? What do you mean by they have escaped?”

Lu Feng and the four vice school heads were stunned.

Other than a few pills that they would use themselves, most of the 6-star apothecaries in the Apothecary School would store the pills they had forged in the Pill Chamber, where they would be labelled with a price and sold when the opportunity presented itself.

The middle-aged man happened to be in charge of this matter.

It could be said that most of the wealth of the 6-star apothecaries in the Apothecary School was within the Pill Chamber, and yet, you are telling me that those pills have escaped?

Are you kidding me?

“It’s true! They have escaped on their own...” the middle-aged man said in a panic, but he had no idea how he could explain the situation.

Just like the other teachers in the Apothecary School, he was a 6-star master teacher as well. Yet, for a person of his capability to be rendered incapable of explaining himself, the situation he had encountered must have been truly shocking.

“What in the world happened?”

With a livid face, Lu Feng demanded furiously, “Explain yourself clearly!”

“It’s like this. I was in one of the Pill Chambers checking on the pills when all of a sudden... the pills began flying by themselves. They rushed out of the chamber and disappeared into the sky...” the middle-aged man said.

“You are telling me that... the pills flew away by themselves?”
The lower jaws of the group of five fell to the ground.

Just like Spirit artifacts, while grade-6 pills did possess a spirit, it was impossible for them to move unless they had acknowledged a master.

But making a pill acknowledge one as its master was far more difficult than making an artifact acknowledge one! It would be difficult for even an apothecary to do so, needless to say, others!

More importantly... it was clearly impossible to make so many pills acknowledge someone as their master at the same time!

Suddenly, Lu Feng recalled something, and he hurriedly asked, "Before the pills started flying, did anyone enter the Pill Chamber?"

"A young man in his twenties came by, saying that he wanted to take a look around. He went around touching each and every pill, but eventually, he left without buying a single one," the middle-aged man said after some contemplation.

There weren't many people who could afford grade-6 pills, so there were rarely any customers at the Pill Chamber. That young man was the only guest he had seen the entire day, so he remembered him clearly.

"A young man in his twenties? Does he look like that?" Lu Feng swiftly drew a picture of a young man in the air using his zhenqi. Naturally, the young man he drew was Zhang Xuan.

Upon reaching Saint realm, one would be able to do accomplish many unimaginable feats with zhenqi, and drawing a picture in midair was only one of the many abilities.

The middle-aged man quickly nodded. "Yes, that's him!"

"As I expected..." In that instant, Lu Feng's body shook uncontrollably, and he nearly went insane.

He had been worrying that Zhang Xuan would reduce the Apothecary School to ruins, just like the Physician School, so he had been keeping his guard up against the latter. But who knew that... instead of destroying their school, he would end up taking their wealth instead!

In order to forge those grade-6 pills, the 6-star apothecaries of the Apothecary School had devoted incalculable time, effort, and most importantly of all, money, to the point that even School Head Lu and the four vice school heads themselves were heavily in debt, waiting for the pills to be sold to earn back their money to clear their debt...

But... just by touching each one, that fellow had all of those pills acknowledge him as their master and took them away...

If the Apothecary Pavilion had collapsed, they could just rebuild it with the profit earned from selling those pills. On top of that, the Master Teacher Academy and the Apothecary Guild would also help to cover some of the cost of reparation as well. However, those pills were their personal property, so it was impossible to obtain any reparation from the Master Teacher Academy or the Apothecary Guild.

In other words, with the disappearance of those pills, nearly all of the apothecaries in the Apothecary School were currently bankrupt!

Lu Feng clutched his chest tightly.

My heart, my lungs, my kidneys...

“Let’s go over and take a look!”

The group hurriedly rushed to the Pill Chamber, only to see that the vast room was completely empty.

As the pills had escaped on their own accord, they had no concrete evidence to prove that this was Zhang Xuan’s doing. Thus, if the latter were to deny it vehemently, there would be nothing they could do either!

Lu Feng turned to the middle-aged man and asked anxiously, “Do you know where the young man who touched the pills earlier went to?”

As important as this matter was, it was of greater importance for them to track down Zhang Xuan and stop him from doing any more harm.

After a moment of thought, the middle-aged man replied, “I’m not too sure... Judging from the direction he left in, I think he

might have gone to the Apothecary Auditorium!”

“Apothecary Auditorium?” Lu Feng’s body shook. “This is bad!”

Without any hesitation, he ran out of the Pill Chamber and rushed in the direction of the Apothecary Auditorium. With grim expressions as well, the four vice school heads hurriedly followed him.

The Apothecary Auditorium was where most apothecaries listened to public lectures. It was where most of the students of the Apothecary School usually spent their time.

If that fellow were to go there and lecture like he did outside the library... there might very well be no one left in the entire Apothecary School! Screw that!

While that fellow had destroyed the buildings in the Blacksmith School and Physician School, the damage that he had caused could easily be resolved with ample money. On top of that, his deeds had also boosted the reputation of those schools, and there had been a rise in the number of students who applied for those two schools.

But what he was doing in the Apothecary School was completely different! If he were to conduct another lecture as he had done outside the library and all of the students withdrew from the Apothecary School... A school with only teachers and no students at all would be as good as dead!

In a school, the priority was always the student. Could a teacher without any students still be called a teacher?

Screw that!

It was already bad enough that he had taken all of the grade-6 pills in the Pill Chamber, but now, he was plotting to create an exodus in the Apothecary School as well...

That was as good as snapping the very roots that made the Apothecary School itself!

Lu Feng clutched his chest once more.

My heart, my lungs, my kidney, my bladder...

Moving as fast as they could, it took only ten breaths for School Head Lu and the vice school heads to arrive at the Apothecary Auditorium. What they saw before them left them on the brink of mental breakdown.

The auditorium could hold more than several dozen thousand people simultaneously but was still usually densely packed with people. However, there was nary a human in sight at this very moment. Other than a cat or two here and there, there was not a single soul to be seen.

Somehow, the emptiness seemed to reek of desolation, as if declaring that the era of glory that the Apothecary School had once enjoyed was over.

After searching around, School Head Lu finally found the teacher in charge of managing the Apothecary Auditorium, and he rushed up to question him.

“Wu laoshi, where are the students? Where are the students?!”

Wu Tian was a 6-star apothecary, one of the elders of the Apothecary School.

But instead of responding to School Head Lu’s question, Wu laoshi continued packing his luggage and said, “School head, you came a timely moment. I was intending to head to your office to bid you farewell...”

“Bid me farewell?” Lu Feng’s figure froze, and anxiety swiftly covered his entire face. “Could it be due to that Zhang Xuan again?”

“That’s right.”

Wu Tian nodded with a light chuckle. “Zhang shi’s lecture has truly opened my eyes, so I acknowledged him as my teacher. From this day forth, I shall no longer be an elder of the Apothecary School but an ordinary member of the Xuanxuan Faction! I shall study hard there and aim to achieve a breakthrough as soon as I can!”

“You have... acknowledged him as your teacher?” The edge of Lu Feng’s lips twitched, and he nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

The fact that Wu Tian was a lecturer for several dozen thousand students reflected the extent of his capability and his standing in the Apothecary School. Yet, a figure like him... had actually acknowledged Zhang Xuan as his teacher?

You must be freaking kidding me!

Not only so, he was even willing to lower himself to become an ordinary member of the Xuanxuan Faction... Tell me, just which screw in your head is loose?

The Xuanxuan Faction is only an ordinary student faction, what is an elder like you getting involved in it for?

“Alright, I will be taking my leave now...”

After Wu Tian finally finished packing up his items, he turned around and left decisively, devoid of any hesitation or wistfulness for the Apothecary School.

“Wu laoshi, wait a moment... If you have acknowledged Zhang Xuan as your teacher, what about the other teachers? We should have around forty teachers in the Apothecary Auditorium, where did they go?” School Head Lu shouted after him.

You might be an elder, an important existence to the Apothecary School, but as long as the other teachers are around, we can surely survive even without you. But... why is the entire area completely empty? Even if the students aren't around, surely the teachers should be?

“The others were far more decisive than I was. At this moment, they have probably already reported to the Xuanxuan Faction. Alright, I really have to get going now. Otherwise, if I miss a lecture, I will lag behind the others...” Wu Tian waved his hands before turning around and walking into the distance.

“All of them have r-r-reported to the Xuanxuan Faction?” Weakness suddenly assaulted Lu Feng, and he fell onto the floor on his bottom. At this instant, he didn't seem like a man who wielded immense power but a defeated old man.

The hell!

It is one thing for the students of the Apothecary School to leave, but for you to actually take the teachers as your students as well...

If that is going to be the case, you might as well demolish my entire Apothecary School! Now that I am without students and teachers, what is the point of all of these facilities...

Lu Feng and the four vice school heads glanced at one another in frenzy. No words could explain what they were feeling at this moment.

“School head, if you hadn’t interfered in You Xu’s matter, I think the most that would have happened to our Apothecary School is only a few collapsed buildings. But this... what should we do now?” Vice School Head Zhou sighed deeply.

“I don’t know either...” Lu Feng muttered with a blank look on his face.

It was just a moment ago that he was doing all he could to prevent Zhang Xuan from destroying the facilities of the Apothecary School. However, at this instant, he found himself wishing for that to happen instead...

The Apothecary School was known as the number one in the Master Teacher Academy due to its overwhelming number of students and excellent teaching staff. It was on this basis that he had become the de facto leader of the Ten Great Master Teachers, the stand-in principal of the academy...

But now that the only ones remaining in the academy were him and the vice school heads, his basis of power had vanished. Perhaps, the influence he had might even be beneath that of the Terpsichore School at this very instant!

How did this befall him?

My heart, my lungs, my kidneys, my bladder... now even the opening to my bladder is hurting...

Reluctant to give up just like that, Lu Feng gritted his teeth in determination and stood up. “Let’s head over to the Xuanxuan Faction. I don’t believe that a freshman like him can really win the loyalty of the three hundred teachers and sixty thousand students of our Apothecary School!”

No matter what, he was a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, a figure who could possibly become a 7-star master teacher in the near future. Would he really lose to a mere freshman?

“Alright!” The other vice school heads nodded.

The group followed Wu laoshi’s figure, and after around twenty minutes later, they finally arrived at the dormitories of the freshmen, which also served as the headquarters of the Xuanxuan Faction.

Even from afar, one could see an enormous crowd gathered in the area.

Standing guard at the main entrance were three mighty-looking Grade-4 students, one wielding a spear, one wielding a saber, and the last one bare-handed.

They were the trio who had lost in the bet against Zhang Xuan back then, Ying Qin, Bai Mian, and Yuan Gang.

Seated on a stool right behind the entrance gate was a fatty. He held onto a basket in his hands as he shook his plump thighs casually in a crude manner. Upon seeing the group of five, he immediately stood up and welcomed them. “Oh, isn’t this our great School Head Lu? Are you intending to enter to listen to the lecture? That will be one high-tier spirit stone each! We don’t discriminate over here, so we charge everyone the same price!”

“What did you say?” Lu Feng’s cheeks twitched violently, and he nearly erupted on the spot.

Upon hearing the argument, Zheng Yang stepped out and clasped his fist.

“School Head Lu, since we are fellow elders of the Master Teacher Academy, I will dispense with the ceremonies and just address you as senior. Senior Lu, my teacher is currently imparting profound knowledge of pill forging, so anyone who wishes to listen to the lecture must pay the entrance fee. This is the rule, as well as a sign of respect for the teaching occupation as well. Uncle Sun is only abiding by the rules, so as juniors, I hope that you won’t make things difficult for my uncle!”

“Senior? Uncle Qiang? Me, a junior?” Lu Feng felt as if his entire world had turned dark.

The hell! When in the world did my standing become even beneath that of a fatty who only knows how to collect money from others?

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Knowing that the other party would only use a ton of twisted logic against him even if he were to argue over the matter of seniority, Lu Feng flung his sleeves furiously and changed the topic. “We are not here to listen to the lecture. Zhang Xuan has hoodwinked the students and staff of our Apothecary School, so we are here to see what kind of underhanded means he used to lure them here...”

“If you are here for the lecture, just say so! Stop coming up with such pathetic excuses. But no matter what you say today, you will have to pay the entrance fee to enter! Otherwise, with a shout, I believe that there are many students here who will be more than willing to see the valiant figure of the stand-in principal refusing to pay the entrance fee to a lecture!” Sun Qiang said as he stretched his back lazily.

“You...” Lu Feng’s nails sank deep into his flesh.

If the fellow really started shouting then, the reputation which he had built up painstakingly over the years would really dissipate into nothing.

Just the shame of it could easily kill him.

“School Head, let’s just get in first...” Knowing that the school head had already lost his cool, Vice School Head Zhou stepped forward and passed five high-tier spirit stones over. “Here!”

“That’s more like it!” Sun Qiang’s eyes lit up.

The members of the Xuanxuan Faction weren’t charged for the lectures, and there weren’t too many outsiders attending the lecture either—the several dozen thousand students and teachers from the Apothecary School had all chosen to join the Xuanxuan Faction.

It wasn't easy for him to find someone to profit from, so naturally, he wanted to take a bit more from them.

In any case, the Apothecary School had already fallen out with the young master, so there was no longer any need to keep up a front before them.

Besides, the esteemed head of the Apothecary School probably couldn't abandon his dignity and squabble with the 'uncle' of the guest elders of the academy.

Well, even if he did, that would be great too. He could make full use of this opportunity to return the favor in the young master's stead.

After all, he had seen for himself how arrogant the other party was earlier in the morning.

“Humph!”

Seeing Vice School Head Zhou pay the spirit stones, Lu Feng harrumphed coldly and walked in, paying no heed to the excited Sun Qiang.

The living quarters of the freshmen was considerably large. Even though it was housing tens of thousands of people, it wasn't cramped at all.

Lu Feng had barely taken a few steps through the entrance when he suddenly caught sight of a figure who made him stop in his tracks, and his eyes narrowed in astonishment.

“Apothecary Lu, why are you here?”

At the back of the crowd, an old man was currently looking ahead of him with eyes gleaming in excitement. Upon hearing someone call him, the old man turned around. He was no other than one of the most esteemed elders in the Apothecary School, Apothecary Lu Yi!

Apothecary Lu Yi was barely younger than You Xu, aged in his nine hundreds. He was one of the oldest elders in the Apothecary School, and over the years, he had contributed greatly to it in all aspects.

Stuck at a bottleneck, he had spent the past thirty years of his life secluded in his residence to study. He had rarely appeared

in public, such that even many of the seniors were unaware of his existence. Even in the annual grand Apothecary Impartation Symposium, which Apothecary Lu himself had initiated, one the most prestigious events in the Apothecary School, he had been absent... Why was he suddenly here?

“Shhh, don’t speak. Just listen... Marvelous, this is indeed marvelous! To think that even such simple logic can be incorporated into pill forging as well, unbelievable...”

Waving his hands impatiently, Apothecary Lu Yi ignored School Head Lu and turned his attention back to the stage.

“Apothecary Lu...”

Dark lines streaked across the furious Lu Feng’s face. He stepped forward to call out to Lu Yi once more, but at that instant, Vice School Head Wei suddenly tugged at his robe and said, “School head, look at Apothecary Lu’s clothes...”

“His clothes?” Lu Feng hurriedly turned his glance over, and what he saw left his mouth twitching endlessly.

As an elder of the Apothecary School, naturally, he was still dressed in the master teacher robe. However, two huge words were weaved on his chest—Xuanxuan Faction! Clearly, even he had joined the student faction as well!

“It’s not only Apothecary Lu... School head, take a look around us,” Vice School Head Wei said as he gestured to the surroundings.

Lu Feng hurriedly looked around, and he immediately saw a few familiar figures amid the crowd.

“Apothecary Bai? Wasn’t he exploring the world? The last time I invited him to conduct a lecture, his face grew so dark that it seemed as if I was forcing him to commit suicide. Why would he... be wearing the robe of the Xuanxuan Faction?”

“Apothecary Ren... his Clearflame Pill Forging Technique is currently the most popular class in the Apothecary School, and he is one of the teachers who has contributed immensely to the growth of the school as well. He’s even on the list of the most respected teachers in the academy... He joined the Xuanxuan Faction as well?”

“That is Apothecary Qiu! I even studied from him at one point...”

...

With every figure he saw, School Head Lu’s face turned a shade darker. By the time he was done, he felt as if the string of sanity in his head was going to snap.

There were a few esteemed retired old teachers in the Apothecary School whom even he didn’t have the authority to mobilize, and yet, here they were, having joined the Xuanxuan Faction voluntarily...

To think the influence of a mere student faction would be greater than that of a stand-in principal like him...

More importantly, every single of them was completely enraptured by the lecture, pricking up their ears for fear that they might miss a single word...

What was this insanity before him? Had the world gone mad?

Just as Lu Feng thought that he might really go mad at that very instant, Vice School Head Wei suddenly nudged him and pointed forward. “School Head, isn’t that... Lu Hui?”

Once again, Lu Feng felt as if his sanity was pushed a step closer to the edge of a cliff.

Amidst the crowd, he saw a young man looking at the stage excitedly, as if he was going to meet his idol.

Who else could it be other than his direct disciple who had reported Zhang Xuan’s presence in the Apothecary School earlier to him, Lu Hui?

When they left for the Apothecary Pavilion, they had left Lu Hui to take care of the library. When did the other party sneak here... and what was with the Xuanxuan Faction uniform he was wearing?

They had only parted a few moments ago!

Did he really betray them in such a short period of time?

“Lu Hui!” Lu Feng bellowed furiously.

Hearing that voice, Lu Hui noticed that his teacher was there too. He hurriedly squeezed through the crowd to head toward his teacher and bowed deeply. “Teacher, I... I saw that there were many students of our school heading here to listen to the lecture, so I couldn’t help but tag along as well. Listening to Zhang Shi’s lecture, I thought that it was amazing, so I joined the Xuanxuan Faction as well...”

Fearing that his teacher would blame him, he hurriedly tried to explain himself.

“Wonderful... Wonderful!”

Lu Feng’s face grew so red that it seemed as if blood was going to ooze from his skin. “Are you going to withdraw from my tutelage too?”

“This... I will be truly grateful if teacher can grant me that!”
Lu Hui bowed deeply.

“Grant your head!” Clenching his jaws tightly, Lu Feng really felt like strangling the young man before him at that very instant.

It was just a moment ago that the other party had been reporting Zhang Xuan’s activities to him, but ten minutes later, the other party suddenly turned on him...

Are you really my direct disciple?

Unable to take it any longer, Lu Feng turned his gaze to the young man on the stage. “Humph, let me see what kind of sorcery that fellow used to make all of you so utterly enamored by him...”

At this moment, the young man on the stage had already completed his lecture, and he was in the midst of answering questions.

“Zhang Shi, when I forge the Refining Yang Pill, the pill often turns yellow upon formation. May I know if there is any solution to that?” asked one of the apothecaries amid the crowd.

“In order to bring out the true essence of the Refining Yang Pill, the apothecary forging the pill must be rich in yang

energy as well. Even though there's no problem in your cultivation, a trauma that you suffered when you were younger has resulted in a lingering surge of cold energy within your body, leading to physical frailty. As such, you lack the vitality to forge such a pill. Even if you are able to form the pill, it is unlikely for the pill to harness much medicinal energy.”

At this point, the young man on the stage glanced at the apothecary in the crowd and asked, “If I'm not mistaken, the Refining Yang Pills you forge aren't very effective, are they?”

The apothecary hurriedly nodded. “That's right!”

The other party's analysis was spot-on.

“Since you have joined the Xuanxuan Faction, you are one of us, and I can't possibly give up on our own members. Alright, I will give you this grade-6 Searing Yang Pill then. With this, you should be able to expel the cold energy in your body easily. Once you do so, you won't face any problems forging the Refining Yang Pill anymore. On top of that, you should be able to make the breakthrough to Chrysalis realm as well!”

Zhang Xuan flicked his finger, and a pill flew toward the apothecary.

Seeing that pill, Vice School Head Wei's lips twitched. “That pill is mine...”

He recognized the pill. It was the one he had forged and stored at the Pill Chamber to be sold...

“Yes!”

However, no one paid any heed to Vice School Head Wei's exclamation. The apothecary caught the pill and consumed it immediately.

Gugugugu!

Not too long later, spiritual energy gushed into him, and with a deafening roar, his aura suddenly surged furiously, soaring into the clouds.

Chrysalis realm, reached!

“Thank you, Zhang shi!”

Not expecting that he would be able to achieve a breakthrough on top of resolving an existing trauma he was suffering from, the apothecary immediately kneeled onto the floor and kowtowed out of gratitude.

“Zhang shi, I...”

The next moment, a few more people raised their hands and asked their questions.

It was as if the young man had a pair of eyes that could peer through the essence of the world. He could easily tell what kind of constitution everyone had, and he could analyze the root of their problems and answer their questions easily. When he encountered those who seemed to be on the brink of a breakthrough, he would also bestow them with a grade-6 pill without any hesitation.

The sound of breakthroughs sounded endlessly beneath the stage.

Looking at that sight, Lu Feng and the vice school heads couldn't help but feel their hearts ache.

Those grade-6 pills that the young man was giving out freely had been forged painstakingly by them. They had invested a huge amount of time, effort, and money for them, and each of them was worth a fortune. Yet, this fellow was giving them out so casually like that...

The more Lu Feng thought about it, the more furious he felt. But he knew that if he were to rush forward to demand those pills be returned to him, he would surely be kicked out by the students and teachers in the crowd, and his reputation would be shattered as well.

“Let's return!” Gritting his teeth, School Head Lu turned around and left.

Not only did the other party steal away his students and teachers, the other party even made use of his pills to win their hearts and loyalty... How could he possibly keep his calm before this?

If he were to watch on, he might just die of anger!

But if he were to report this to the Master Teacher Pavilion, it would just make him appear petty in comparison.

After all, the main purpose of pills wasn't to serve as decoration within a chamber but to benefit humanity.

Not to mention, he was the head of the Apothecary School, and the pills were being distributed to benefit the students of the Apothecary School.

The other party might be making use of his pills to win the hearts of the populace, but even he had to admit that the other party had distributed them in an ideal manner. Each of those pills were given to the person who needed it the most, thus maximizing their worth.

“Return?” the vice school heads asked blankly.

Aren't we going to cause some trouble and coax the students to come back with us?

We are going to leave like that, without doing anything?

“What else do you think we can do? Do you really think it's possible for us to coax the students back with us given the current state of affairs?” School Head Lu spat through gritted teeth.

“This...” The vice school heads took a look at the crowd around them and subconsciously shook their heads.

Judging from the delighted faces among the crowd, they wouldn't even be able to coax the teachers to leave with them, let alone the students.

“What do we do now?”

Considering that the teachers and students were all there, the Apothecary School was nothing more than an empty shell at this point...

“What do we do? We shall hold an Elder Conference!” Lu Feng said resolutely.

The other party had already captured the hearts of several ten thousand students. Even he didn't dare to provoke him at the moment, so the only thing they could do at the moment was to

hold an Elder Conference when they returned to decide on a countermeasure.

Otherwise, if both teachers and students began acting out of their places, what would become of the Master Teacher Academy?

“Yes!” Vice School Head Wei nodded.

If this problem wasn’t resolved, the Master Teacher Academy could be in for great trouble...

What was this? To think that the Master Teacher Academy would face such a serious problem over a single You Xu. If he could, he would really have wanted to chop that fellow into pieces.

“Let’s return!”

Having come to a decision, the five of them turned around and left.

After leaving the Xuanxuan Faction, they returned back to the Apothecary School. However, watching the previously bustling school become devoid of any life, they couldn’t help but feel like crying.

When had the Apothecary School been in such a pathetic state before?

After a moment of silence, Vice School Head Zhou asked, “School Head, why don’t you... apologize to Zhang shi? Otherwise, this might really just be the end of our Apothecary School!”

“Apologize to him? Dream on!”

Lu Feng clenched his teeth furiously. “Wait here for a moment, I’ll gather the Ten Great Master Teachers right now for an urgent meeting... No, I should call Mu shi over too. If I don’t make that lawbreaking fellow pay for this, I will abandon my surname Lu!”

...

In the tallest tower in the Master Teacher Academy, there was an exquisite room.

In that room was a long oval table with thirteen seats, and at this very moment, ten of them were filled up.

“School Head Lu, why did you gather us so urgently?” School Head Mo asked.

“Could it be that... you’ve found clues about Senior Byzantium Helios’s whereabouts?”

“That is great news! I have been combing every possible location, but I couldn’t find any leads at all...”

The other school heads chirped in.

It had only been five to six hours since Zhang Xuan had stepped into the Apothecary School and all of the students and teachers had joined the Xuanxuan Faction. As it had happened too fast, the other school heads hadn’t heard of the news yet.

“It’s not regarding Senior Byzantium Helios but the survival of our Master Teacher Academy. Please wait for a moment, I will speak after Mu shi arrives!” Lu Feng waved his hands.

“The survival of our Master Teacher Academy?”

“Could it be that you have found the Otherworldly Demons who captured Senior Byzantium Helios?”

“If that’s the case, a huge battle will be inevitable...”

...

Seeing the grim expression on Lu Feng’s face and hearing how he had even invited Mu shi to the meeting, the school heads glanced at one another with grave expressions.

On top of enlightening the masses, the Master Teacher Pavilion also shouldered the responsibility of protecting humanity as well.

Since the Otherworldly Demons had gone to the extent of kidnapping Senior Byzantium Helios several days ago, there was no doubt that they were up to something. The moment that they appeared, the Master Teacher Academy would have to devote every single one of its members to stopping them.

Jiya!

In that moment, the door suddenly opened and Mu shi walked in.

“Paying respects to Mu shi!”

Those in the room hurriedly stood up and clasped their fists.

Mu shi was a 7-star master teacher from the headquarters, and he was tasked with the responsibility of electing the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy and facilitating the handover of power. Thus, he could be considered the superior of the school heads, and none of them dared show him any disrespect.

After gesturing for the group to settle down, Mu Yuan asked with a frown, “Lu Feng, why did you summon me so urgently? Did something happen?”

“Since everyone is gathered here, I shall begin!”

Lu Feng nodded. “In the current batch of freshman, there is a student named Zhang Xuan. I believe that everyone here should have heard of him!”

“Naturally!”

With the exception of Mu Yuan, who frowned upon hearing the name, the other school heads nodded.

Ever since arriving in the academy, the only time that he had headed out was when he sensed Byzantium Helios Beast’s aura. Other than that, he spent nearly all of his time cultivating in his residence. As a result, he hadn’t heard of the affairs regarding Zhang Xuan before.

“Mu shi, this Zhang Xuan is...” School Head Mo swiftly explained the matter to the other party.

Mu shi’s eyes lit up upon hearing the introduction. “A master teacher who has comprehended the Eye of Insight? Such a genius has appeared in the Master Teacher Academy?”

Clearing the records of the Blacksmith School and Physician School and defeating You Xu in a Life-and-Death Physician Duel meant nothing to him. After all, those were merely supporting occupations.

To Mu shi, what he thought was the most important was one's aptitude as a master teacher itself.

A master teacher who had comprehended the Eye of Insight would eventually become an incredible force in the Master Teacher Continent as long as they didn't fall.

Not even a single talent of such caliber would appear in the Sage Clans once in a millennium.

Seeing the excited gleam in Mu shi's eyes, Lu Feng hurriedly interjected. "Mu shi, please allow me to continue first before you make your judgement... I acknowledge the fact that Zhang Xuan is indeed an incredible talent, and his appearance would be a blessing to the Master Teacher Academy if he were to use his power for good. However, if he were to use his power for evil instead, he could easily destroy the Master Teacher Academy and the millenniums of history behind it!"

"Use his power for evil?" Mu shi frowned for a moment before nodding.

The Eye of Insight allowed one to see past falsehood and peer into the essence of things. If he were to use it as a tool to guide others down the right path, he would definitely become a valuable aid to humanity... but if he were to use it for evil, that could potentially end in a catastrophe.

Even though such matters weren't recorded in the annals, there had indeed been cases where talented master teachers had betrayed humanity.

Seven thousand years ago, a genius of humble background had succeeded in clearing the 7-star master teacher examination before thirty, causing a huge uproar at that moment. Just when everyone had thought that he would become a pillar of humanity... the Master Teacher Pavilion made a misjudgment on a matter and wronged him. Out of rage, that genius hunted down the 37 master teachers who were involved in the matter and slaughtered them.

The shock wave of that battle reduced an entire capital extending over a radius of three thousand li into dust, and over a hundred million people had lost their lives. The resulting

destruction was not beneath that of an invasion from an army of ten thousand Otherworldly Demons.

Due to the severe aftermath, the Master Teacher Pavilion couldn't cover for him either. Thus, they issued a 'Master Teacher Pursuit Decree', dispatching high-ranked master teachers to hunt him down.

Knowing that a pursuit decree had been released, that genius had fled to the borders and lured over nine thousand 6-star master teachers and above into a trap laid by the Otherworldly Demons at Fubo Ridge.

That was truly a gruesome battle. Even though they had succeeded in killing that genius eventually, the Master Teacher Pavilion had also suffered heavy damage in return. Three 8-star master teachers, 134 7-star master teachers, and 7612 6-star master teachers died in the clash.

Eventually, the others named it the 'Calamity of Fubo'!

That could be said to be one of the greatest blows the Master Teacher Pavilion had suffered ever since Kong shi unified the Master Teacher Continent.

It had taken a long time for the Master Teacher Pavilion to recover from the aftermath of the matter.

Due to that matter, the Master Teacher Pavilion had also altered their recruitment rules as well. On top of considering talent, character and morals were also important aspects to be assessed as well.

If one had a poor character and was immoral, the more resources the Master Teacher Pavilion devoted into grooming one, the greater the danger humanity would be in.

The number of master teachers who had possessed the Eye of Insight was few, even considering the long history of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Each of them were top-notch talents, figures who had rattled the Master Teacher Continent in their era. If they were to use their power for justice, humanity could be brought to greater heights. However, if they were to turn to evil, the destruction they could potentially cause was far greater than the Calamity of Fubo.

“Could it be that the Zhang Xuan you all spoke of has poor character and is immoral?” Mu shi asked doubtfully.

If that was the case, they would really have to tread carefully. Otherwise, they would be bringing a great calamity upon the Master Teacher Continent.

“How is that possible!”

Hearing those words, School Head Mo exclaimed with indignation. “In order to allow more students to enroll at the Master Teacher Academy and bolster the forces of humanity, Zhang shi gave away the forty thousand points he had accumulated to others without asking for anything in return. How could a person with such magnanimity possibly turn to evil?”

“School Head Mo, I have to ask of you not to be fooled by appearances. His doings are a clear attempt to rally the freshmen to his side so that he could establish his Xuanxuan Faction!” Lu Feng waved his hands.

“Xuanxuan Faction?” Mu shi asked doubtfully.

“The Xuanxuan Faction is the student faction established by Zhang Xuan. Student factions serve as a tool of cohesion to promote camaraderie among master teachers, allowing them to work together toward improving themselves. As such, the academy has imposed no restrictions toward them. However... it hasn't been long since that fellow enrolled in the academy, but he is already going around trying to win the hearts of the students to gather accomplices for his misdeeds in the academy. It is clear that he has malicious intentions at heart!” Lu Feng said.

“School Head Lu, as a master teacher, you should watch your words!” School Head Mo's face darkened.

What do you mean gather accomplices for his misdeeds?

Just because a group of students have gathered together means that they are up to no good?

“Based on my sources, it appears that Zhang shi was unaware of the formation of the Xuanxuan Faction. It was under the oppression of the seniors that led to the freshmen banding

together, and as the most outstanding student among the freshmen, they nominated Zhang shi to be their leader..." Wei Ranxue's complexion looked awful as well.

Given the influence that master teachers wielded, it was imperative that they had to be particularly careful with what they spoke, especially when there was no concrete evidence. Otherwise, an innocent man could possibly be convicted as a result of that.

"Watch my words? I am already watching my words very carefully! Since it has come to this, I shall not hide it anymore then. I will tell you all what happened today, and you can evaluate it for yourselves and see whether I have framed him or not!" Harrumphing coldly, Lu Feng swiftly told the group what he had gone through that day.

"You are saying that... all of the teachers and students of the Apothecary School have joined the Xuanxuan Faction, and even the old elders are no exception to that?"

"So... the Apothecary School is currently nothing more than an empty shell?"

The room abruptly turned silent. The ten school heads along with Mu shi were dumbfounded.

Why did it feel as if they were listening to an unbelievable story instead?

"Indeed! What is most important to a master teacher is their lineage. To make so many people withdraw from the tutelage simultaneously just to join a student faction, there is no doubt that fellow resorted to some underhanded means!"

Lu Feng's face warped in savagery. "If we don't deal with him soon, he could do the same to the other schools as well. Before long, all of the teachers and students in the Master Teacher Academy might soon be his students. If that were to happen, the academy would become nothing more than his plaything!"

Everyone fell silent.

Even School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others were shocked beyond words.

Honestly, they thought that what Zhang Shi had done so far, breaking the records of their schools and destroying their buildings, were already extremely fearsome. Who could have thought that... he could even abduct all of the teachers and students from the Apothecary School with just a lecture?

That was way too terrifying!

Wouldn't everyone in the school become his student or grandstudent if he were to conduct a few more lectures?

After a moment of silence, Mu Shi asked grimly, "Have you heard his lecture?"

"Zhang Xuan allows the members of his Xuanxuan Faction to listen to his lecture for free, but for outsiders, they would have to pay an extremely steep entrance fee to enter. I, Zhou Qing, and the other vice school heads of the Apothecary School had to pay a high-tier spirit stone each just to enter!"

Lu Feng harrumphed coldly. "Naturally, we heard his lecture as well, but his standards can only be said to be subpar. Putting aside the fact that it's complete nonsense, most of what he said was just propaganda to beguile the others into following him!"

"Subpar?" Mu Shi frowned.

"That's right. Also, didn't I mention that he resorted to despicable means to steal the grade-6 pills from our Pill Chamber? In order to win their support, he gave away the pills to students who were on the verge of a breakthrough just to create a false impression of magnanimity before his followers."

Lu Feng recounted his version of events of what he had seen in the Xuanxuan Faction.

"Giving away those pills to those who require them can be considered a merit, but... if he intended to use it to win the support of others, that would paint a completely different picture of the matter!" Mu Shi nodded gravely.

The Master Teacher Academy was a ground to groom students to become pillars of support for humanity, so it was surely a joyful event to see the students growing swiftly. However, if Zhang Xuan had intended to use those stolen pills as a means

to rally others to support him, that could only mean that he lacked righteousness.

“He must be up to no good!” Lu Feng added. “Otherwise, how can a man make so many students and teachers be so loyal to him over the course of just a few hours?”

Mu shi shook his head. “Every cultivator is unique. They have their own expertise and understanding of the world, so the lessons they need are different as well. This is the reason Kong shi proposed the concept of teaching to the individual. To win the acknowledgement of all of the teachers and students through a single lecture and convince them to join the Xuanxuan Faction is indeed not quite possible.”

No matter how formidable a master teacher may be, it was impossible for him to win over everyone.

After all, humans were unlike money, they were incapable of making everyone love them.

Yet... that Zhang shi actually managed to do it. It couldn't help but introduce doubts that he might have resorted to some other underhanded means instead.

“Since this matter has happened in your Apothecary School, how do you intend to deal with it?” Mu shi turned to Lu Feng and asked.

“My intentions are simple. I wish for the ten schools to come to a consensus to evict Zhang Xuan out of the Master Teacher Academy, prohibiting him from taking even a single step into its premises!”

Lu Feng coldly sneered, “After which, he shall be stripped of his master teacher license, banned from taking any master teacher examinations for life!”

821 Quasi 6-star Apothecary

“Evict him from the Master Teacher Academy?”

“Strip him of his master teacher license, banning him from taking the master teacher examination for life?”

Everyone was stunned.

“No, that is definitely out of question!” School Head Mo bellowed furiously.

If that were to happen, putting aside the fact that the Master Teacher Pavilion would lose a precious talent, just the thought of how Zhang Shi’s mysterious teacher would respond to it was enough to send shivers down his spine. Perhaps, the Master Teacher Academy might be completely obliterated with a wave of his hand!

The higher ranked a master teacher was, the more esteemed they became. Even though the Master Teacher Pavilion sought to uphold justice and fairness, it still had practical concerns to consider... Take for example, a hundred thousand 6-star master teacher might be a valuable asset to the Master Teacher Pavilion, but their value was still far beneath that of a 9-star master teacher.

Or taking Kong Shi as example, he was a genius that only appeared once in several dozen thousand years. Putting aside a 9-star master teacher, not even a hundred 9-star master teachers could possibly achieve what he had contributed to humanity in his time.

If Mo Gaoyuan was right and Zhang Shi’s teacher was an 8-star master teacher or above, if the latter were to obliterate the Master Teacher Academy with a slap of his hand, it was likely that the Master Teacher Pavilion wouldn’t utter a word of complaint.

It was unfair, but this was the kind of privilege that top-tier master teachers possessed. After all, there were still many threats that humanity faced where their strength was required.

“Stripping a master teacher’s license concerns his entire future. This is not something we can take lightly!”

Zhao Bingxu spoke up as well. “This is especially so when the person in question is a talented individual. If we handle this inappropriately, I fear that what we will lose is not just a genius. We might risk bringing upon ourselves another Calamity of Fubo!”

“This...” Hearing those words, everyone fell silent.

In truth, the Calamity of Fubo could have been avoided.

It was due to that genius offending the offspring of a Sage Clan and having no backers to support him that he was eventually forced into a corner, resulting in the eventual tragedy.

Considering that Zhang Xuan had already awakened his Eye of Insight before he had even reached 6-star was testimony to his immense talent.

If they were to push him too far and breed malice toward humanity within him, Zhang Xuan could possibly choose to side with the Otherworldly Demons out of fury. With his prowess, that could spell calamity for humanity.

Putting everything aside, with his Eye of Insight, he could possibly become another Kong shi, but for the Otherworldly Demons this time around.

If so, humanity would be in deep trouble.

“School Head Zhao is right!” Mu shi nodded.

“Fine, we can put aside the matter of taking away his master teacher license... However, we have to evict him from the Master Teacher Academy and Hongyuan City! Since he singlehandedly brought about the downfall of my Apothecary School today, he could easily do the same to the other schools tomorrow! By then, what will become of our Master Teacher Academy?” Lu Feng said with gritted teeth.

There was no one who had a response to Lu Feng’s words.

Even School Head Mo, Wei Ranxue, and the others who favored Zhang Xuan couldn’t find any words to respond to

that.

Honestly speaking, given Zhang Xuan's nature, it was very possible that he might wreak havoc in the other schools after he was done with the Apothecary School.

It was as if he was an ox pulling a plow behind him. It seemed as if he just wouldn't be content until he overturned everything in his path. Furthermore, after what he had done to the Apothecary School... there was no one in the academy who could confidently say that they could stop him!

After a moment of silence, an old man spoke up.

"I concur with School Head Lu's judgement. This kind of trouble should be chased away as soon as possible! Putting aside Hongyuan City, we shouldn't even allow him to remain within Hongyuan Empire!"

The head of the Formation Master School, Chen Chengxun!

School Head Chen had always maintained close ties with School Head Lu, and they often stood on the same ground for most affairs.

Another school head nodded in agreement. "I concur as well!"

The head of the Painter School, Song Danqing!

"I disagree. The purpose of those tests in the Master Teacher Academy is for them to be challenged, and there are no rules banning students conducting lectures either. Zhang shi's doings might be exaggerated, but he hasn't done anything that infringed on the rules. What right do we have to evict him?" School Head Mo argued.

"Indeed. His deeds in the Apothecary School might seem ridiculous, but as you have said, even a veteran elder like Apothecary Lu chose to join the Xuanxuan Faction to listen to his lectures. This shows that, unlike what you have claimed, there is an extremely high value to his lectures!"

"As master teachers, we should be magnanimous! For someone of Zhang shi's capability, I think that not only should we not chase him away, we should even keep him in the

academy as one of our teachers. Just imagine the heights he could bring our Master Teacher Academy to!”

Zhao Bingxu and Wei Ranxue also spoke up.

After which, School Head Zhong of the Physician School expressed his disapproval of the motion whereas School Head Feng of the Celestial Designer School expressed his approval.

After hearing their words, Mu shi turned to the remaining two in the room.

“So far, it’s four for and four against. What about you two?”

Currently, Lu Feng of the Apothecary School, Chen Chengxun of the Formation Master School, Song Danqing of the Painter School, and School Head Feng of the Celestial School were in support of evicting Zhang Xuan from the Master Teacher Academy whereas School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, School Head Wei, and School Head Zhong were against it.

Only two more men hadn’t expressed their views yet—the head of the Martial Arts School, Xu Changqing, and the head of the Demonic Tunist School, Jiang Qingqin.

“Zhang shi’s students are currently the guest elders of our Martial Arts School. Since even his students have such a deep insight into battle techniques, nothing needs to be said about him. My view is that we should have Zhang shi remain!” Xu Changqing said.

“What about you?” Mu shi asked.

Everyone turned their sights to Jiang Qingqin.

It was five against four. If the other party were to vote in favor of Lu Feng, it would lead to a five against five, a draw, and there might be another round of voting in the near future.

Otherwise, the motion would be scrapped entirely.

“I haven’t met Zhang Xuan for myself, so I don’t think I am in a good position to pass judgement on him. Thus, I will refrain from voting,” Jiang Qingqin said. “Besides, the most important matter we have at hand isn’t to deal with a single student of the academy but to find Senior Byzantium Helios!”

“Refrain from voting?”

“That’s quite a wise decision. It’s still too early to see who is right and who is wrong, so it might be better to back out for the moment.”

“School Head Jiang has never been concerned about worldly affairs, so it’s not too surprising that he wants to stay out of this matter!”

The others nodded in response.

The head of the Demonist Tunist School, Jiang Qingqin, had always been nonchalant about the world around him, choosing to stay out of troublesome affairs whenever possible. It was within the expectations of the other school heads that he would stay out of the voting.

“Since the current vote is five is to four, this motion will be scrapped. For the time being, everyone should focus their efforts on finding Byzantium Helios Beast!”

Announcing the verdict, Mu shi waved his hands. “Just as I have said before, the person who finds Byzantium Helios Beast will be the next principal. As for the matter regarding Zhang Xuan, I shall leave it to the next principal to decide how to deal with him!”

Even though Mu shi was a 7-star master teacher from the headquarters, he was ultimately still an outsider in this matter. It would still be for the best to allow the Master Teacher Academy to resolve the matter among themselves.

Otherwise, he could possibly be cast under suspicion of exploiting his authority.

Upon hearing the conclusion of the matter, Lu Feng panicked, and he hurriedly turned to Mu shi with an indignant look on his face. “Mu shi...”

“Alright, this matter is already settled. Dismissed!” Unwilling to speak any further, Mu shi waved his hands and walked out of the room.

“Farewell!”

Following which, School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others left as well.

Soon, Lu Feng was the only one remaining in the room. Amid the deafening silence, his face warped savagely, and he clenched his fists tightly.

“Damn it...”

Furious, he slammed his fist on the table.

“Fine, I will let you get away for now. However, you’d better pray that you don’t slip up. Otherwise... I will make your life a living hell!” Lu Feng roared furiously.

...

While Lu Feng was reporting the matter to the Ten Great Master Teachers, Zhang Xuan finally finished with his lecture as well.

Back then, when he had been standing before the library of the Apothecary School, he hadn’t been standing in a daze. Rather, he had been using his soul to gather all of the books within into his Library of Heaven’s Path.

As a 4-star apothecary, he had been able to skip right to the 4-star and 5-star books. As such, it had only taken him an hour to successfully compile the 5-star and 6-star Heaven’s Path manual.

After studying the manuals, he’d suddenly felt a surge of inspiration, so he’d begun lecturing right outside the library.

The content he had spoken of was profound yet easy to understand, interpreting the essence of pill forging directly. The crowd in the surroundings couldn’t help but be drawn in by his words.

This was also the reason behind the first exodus of the Apothecary School to the Xuanxuan Faction.

After he was done, Zhang Xuan had first gone to the Pill Chamber, hoping that there might be a Grand Intermittence Pill there. However, to his disappointment, there was nothing of the sort there. Nevertheless, not wanting to make a trip for nothing, he’d decided to take the grade-6 pills with him so as to return the favor to Lu Feng.

Following which, he had headed straight for the Ancestral Hall, where the Pill Debate examination was conducted.

Just as Vice School Head Wei and the others had seen, he had activated the Communication Jade Screen, not only to clear the Pill Debate but also to request the pill formula of the Grand Intermittence Pill as well.

Without any experience in pill forging, it would have been impossible for Zhang Xuan to pass the practical examination. However, if it was just a Pill Debate, given his thorough understanding and deep insight into pill forging, not even a 7-star apothecary would be a match for him.

In the Pill Debate, he had utterly crushed the 7-star apothecaries on the other end of the screen and received his quasi 6-star apothecary emblem, as well as the pill formula of the Grand Intermittence Pill.

Having achieved what he had gone for, Zhang Xuan had initially intended to leave. However, recalling how he had taken so many grade-6 pills for nothing, he'd still felt a little guilty. After all, his grudge was with Lu Feng, not with the Apothecary School. However, the matter was already done... Thus, he had gone to the Apothecary Symposium to conduct a lecture as a form of compensation to the Apothecary School.

Who knew that his lecture would end up aweing both students and teachers alike?

As a result, the grand sight of countless elders, teachers, and students abandoning the Apothecary School for the Xuanxuan Faction had come to be.

As for the matters regarding the uniform and the entrance fee, those were Ruohuan gongzi and Sun Qiang's doing.

“So, this is the key to forging the Delight Harnessing Pill. I finally get it!”

“I feel that with my current comprehension of pill forging, as long as my cultivation reaches the required level, I will surely be able to forge a grade-6 pill!”

“This lecture has truly benefited me greatly. It's as good as three years' hard work on my part!”

...

While Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief and departed from the stage, the apothecaries beneath the stage had intoxicated expressions on their faces, still immersed in the lecture they had just heard.

Zhang shi's lecture had been random and abrupt, raising points on the unexpected aspects of pill forging. However, his words eventually tied together perfectly like puzzle pieces to form a profound picture of pill forging, giving the listeners a striking and deep insight into the essence of pill forging. As long as they were to ruminate over his words carefully and decipher them, their proficiency in pill forging would surely rise immensely in the short run!

It was just a single lecture, but it was equivalent to several years of their hard work.

...

“Genius! He's truly a genius! To think that pill forging can be interpreted from such an angle as well...”

Apothecary Lu stood beside some of the other old elders of the Apothecary School as they discussed Zhang shi's lecture, and the more they spoke, the more astonished they became.

At their age, it was already far too difficult for them to make a breakthrough. If only they had listened to such a lecture ten years earlier, every single one of them would have been 7-star apothecaries by now!

“From now on, I am a member of the Xuanxuan Faction. I will never ever return to the Apothecary School!”

“Me too! I would rather remain here to listen to Zhang shi's amazing lectures than rot away in the Apothecary School. Perhaps, if we listen to a few more, we might just be able to pass our 7-star apothecary examinations!”

Just when the few elders were overwhelmed with excitement, they suddenly saw the young man who had just lectured them abruptly walking toward them.

“Zhang shi!”

The elders clasped their fists and bowed politely.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony. I am here to request something of you all,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Feel free to speak, Zhang shi! As long as it’s within the means of old bones like us, we will surely give it our best!”

Even though they weren’t students of the academy, they had become completely impressed by the young man before them after hearing the lecture as well.

“Thank you, but it’s actually not that much. I just need you all to collaborate together and forge a pill for me!” Zhang Xuan revealed his motive.

“Collaborate together?” The group was stunned.

Despite the profound understanding of pill forging that the young man before him had, he still needed their help?

“That’s right. I wish to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Grand Intermittence Pill... A grade-7 pill?” Apothecary Lu exclaimed in shock.

822 Phoenix Timber Core

Grand Intermittence Pill was extremely well-known for its miraculous ability in allowing one to regrow even severed limbs. But naturally, it was an extremely difficult pill to forge as well.

Even among grade-7 pills, it could be considered one of the more advanced ones. It would be difficult for even an average 7-star apothecary to forge it, so how could they possibly succeed?

For all Upper Nine Paths occupations, the difference between each rank became exponentially larger the higher one climbed.

Even though it was only a single rank of difference between 6-star and 7-star, it was like the difference between a Saint and a Transcendent Mortal. There was an unbreachable gap between the two.

In fact, even within the rank itself, there was a vast difference in the capability between low-tier and pinnacle.

In other words... even though they were all 6-star pinnacle apothecaries, just a toe away from achieving a breakthrough to 7-star, it was still utterly impossible for them to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill, which only 7-star pinnacle apothecaries were capable of forging.

With a bitter smile, Apothecary Lu shook his head. "I'm afraid that we might not be of much help here..."

"I know that it's difficult, that's why I need you to work together with one another," Zhang Xuan replied.

"Work together? But we have never worked together before, it won't be easy to do so..." The group shook their heads.

Pill forging wasn't like fighting a battle, where each cultivator just had to cover for one another... Every single apothecary had their own unique pill forging technique and style. It was more likely than not that if two apothecaries tried to work on the same cauldron, a major error would occur somewhere.

This could easily lead to all of the medicinal herbs being ruined, or in the worst-case scenario, a cauldron explosion even!

That was not to say that it was completely impossible for apothecaries to work together on the same cauldron. There were such cases in the world, but most of them were students who had been training to work with each other from the very start, and after several dozen years of collaboration, they gained the ability to understand one another by the slightest gesture or gaze, allowing them to synergize with each other perfectly.

But on the other hand, Apothecary Lu and the others had already tread on their own path for several centuries now, and they had their own unique forging style tailored to their own needs. If they were to forcefully work with one another, it was one thing for them to fail in forming the pill, but in the worst-case scenario... they might even end up blowing away the entire Master Teacher Academy!

As one of the more advanced grade-7 pills, the medicinal energy contained within a Grand Intermittence Pill was comparable to the might of a Saint 4-dan expert. If a mistake were to occur, with their cultivation of Saint 1-dan, it would be impossible for them to suppress the explosion.

“There’s no need to worry about that. I have a few pill forging techniques here that are suited for just that, so I hope that you can familiarize yourselves with them quickly. As for the collaboration, as long as you listen to my instructions strictly, there won’t be any problem with it!” Zhang Xuan said as he whipped out a few books and passed them over.

These were the pill forging techniques he had deduced that he would require for the forging of the Grand Intermittence Pill.

“Pill forging techniques?” Apothecary Lu and the others grabbed the books given to them and began browsing through them.

Each of them took a different book each, and the content of each book was different as well.

“Misty Rain Pill Forging Art...”

It didn't take too long for Apothecary Lu to finish browsing through his book, and by the time he was done, his hands were trembling intensely.

The Misty Rain Pill Forging Art was centered around stability, taming whatever destructive force it encountered while silently nourishing the pill. The technique was extremely profound and intricate; despite Apothecary Lu's many years of experience, he had never seen anything like it before. Without a doubt, if he were to successfully master this technique, his proficiency of pill forging would soar once again.

By then, as long as his cultivation hit the requirement, he was confident that he would clear the 7-star apothecary examination easily!

But what had truly left him astounded was that... the Misty Rain Pill Forging Art complemented his cultivation technique perfectly! If he were to master this technique, even his fighting prowess would be enhanced as well!

“This is truly a good pill forging technique. It complements my Spirit Turtle zhenqi splendidly...”

“The pill forging technique in the book supplements my cultivation technique impeccably too...”

After reading their own books, the eyes of the others were also glowing, and they couldn't help but exclaim in excitement.

Hearing those words, Apothecary Lu took the books of his other friends and browsed through them swiftly as well, and his eyes couldn't help but widen.

He realized that the pill forging techniques listed in the books were a perfect fit for their individual cultivation techniques and constitutions, such that he couldn't pick a single flaw from it.

In other words... Zhang Shi had designed these pill forging techniques specifically for them! Otherwise, considering how each cultivator had his own unique cultivation technique and constitution, how could there be such a coincidence that all of

them would have a pill forging technique that was a perfect fit for them?

But to tailor a pill forging technique to the needs of another... Just how deep of an understanding must one have of pill forging to be able to do so?

Even the most capable 7-star pinnacle apothecaries were incapable of such!

“T-this...”

Naturally, since Apothecary Lu had noticed this much, the others couldn't possibly remain oblivious to it. With eyes widened with respect and awe, they gazed deeply at the young man before them.

They had thought that the other party was amazing when they were listening to his lecture, but at this moment, what they had was deep reverence for him.

After recovering from the shock, Apothecary Lu asked, “Has Zhang Shi prepared the required medicinal herbs yet? According to what I know, the main medicinal herb of the Grand Intermittence Pill, the Grand Intermittence Grass, is a rare saint herb!”

As the saying goes, ‘even the most capable of chefs can't cook without ingredients.’

The medicinal ingredients of grade-7 pills might not be too difficult to find within a Conferred Empire, but in Hongyuan City, that would be no easy feat.

This was especially so for the Grand Intermittence Grass. Putting aside how it was rare and impossible to be cultivated, its natural habitat also tended to be regions plagued with poisonous worms. Even Saint 4-dan experts would be troubled to procure it.

“I have already applied for the required medicinal herbs from the headquarters,” Zhang Xuan replied.

After obtaining the pill formula of the Grand Intermittence Pill, he swiftly looked through the herbs required and noted that the main ingredient, Grand Intermittence Grass, was hard

to obtain in Hongyuan City. Thus, he applied for it from the headquarters.

“You applied for the medicinal herb from the headquarters?”

Apothecary Lu and the other apothecaries glanced at one another, astounded. “But given the steep price of the Grand Intermittence Grass, will the headquarters really be willing to give it to you?”

Applying and purchasing from the headquarters were two separate matters.

Applying was equivalent to asking for a subsidy from the headquarters. Should the headquarters accept the application, they would give the medicinal herb to the applicant without charging anything.

On the other hand, purchasing would require the purchaser to pay a certain price in exchange for the medicinal herb.

But the Grand Intermittence Grass was a rare and valuable saint herb. Even if one were to purchase it from the headquarters, it would cost at least several hundred or even a thousand high-tier spirit stones. To apply for it... how could the headquarters possibly accept the application?

If it was that simple, the Apothecary Guild headquarters would have already closed down from the sheer expenses incurred from apothecaries applying for medicinal herbs.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before replying. “I happened to solve the problems of one of their apothecaries, and the other party promised to help me settle this matter... so I don’t think there will be any trouble!”

The Communication Wall could only transfer written information whereas the Jade Communication Screen allowed one to transmit and view visual information as well.

Back then, when Zhang Xuan had been taking his 6-star apothecary examination, one of the apothecaries on the other end had sent a video of someone forging pills, and Zhang Xuan had helped the other party analyze and resolve a few problems in his forging method, thus winning the other party’s

respect. In light of that, the other party had offered to help him apply for the Grand Intermittence Grass.

But back then, the other party had spoken of it lightly as if it was nothing... Could the other party have been lying to him?

Apothecary Lu frowned slightly upon hearing Zhang Xuan's story, and he said, "Even for the apothecaries of the headquarters, it would still be difficult for them to apply for medicinal herbs without some connections. Do you know of the name of the apothecary you spoke to?"

"If I recall correctly, I think his name is... Wu Huayu! Back then, of the ten apothecaries projected in the Jade Communication Wall, he was the one who was the rowdiest..." Zhang Xuan replied.

However, before Zhang Xuan could finish his words, the lower jaws of the elders before him abruptly fell to the ground, and they began shaking in fear.

"What's wrong?" Seeing the bizarre state of the elders before him, Zhang Xuan frowned.

"Zhang shi... do you have any idea who Wu Huayu is?" Apothecary Lu asked with quivering lips.

"How could I possibly know? But considering how dim-witted he was and the ton of nonsense that flew out of his mouth, he is probably no one important. Why, do you know each other?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Dim-witted?"

"Cough cough..."

Apothecary Lu nearly choked. Seeing that the man before him was truly ignorant of it, he could only shake his head with a bitter smile. "Wu Huayu is the head of the Qingyuan Conferred Empire Apothecary Guild... a 7-star pinnacle apothecary!"

The others also hurriedly nodded, as if fearing that Zhang Xuan wouldn't believe it.

It was one thing for you not to recognize Guild Leader Wu, but to say that he is dim-witted...

That is the number one apothecary of Qingyuan Empire, and yet you speak as if he is nothing at all!

More importantly, you even helped to solve his problems?

Just what kind of monster is standing before me?

“Guild leader? You are saying that person is the leader of the Apothecary Guild? I see...”

Zhang Xuan was stunned for an instant before he slowly nodded. “Since he’s the guild leader, there shouldn’t be any problem with obtaining the Grand Intermittence Grass. As for the other ingredients, it shouldn’t be any trouble obtaining them in Hongyuan City. Here is the list of ingredients that I will need...” Zhang Xuan said as he passed a piece of paper over.

“As apothecaries, you have more connections in Hongyuan City than I do. Thus, I will have to trouble you to help me source them. If you see any of these herbs, do help me purchase them, I will repay you later. If I don’t have enough money, I will trade grade-6 pills for them...”

Since Zhang Xuan was troubling them to find the medicinal herbs for him, he couldn’t possibly have them pay out of their pocket for it too.

It just so happened that he had quite a few grade-6 pills remaining in his hands, so he could use them to trade for the medicinal herbs.

“The medicinal herbs on this list are quite affordable...”

Apothecary Lu took the paper, browsed through the list of ingredients, and remarked, “I think we might be able to gather all of these medicinal herbs through our own private stashes, so there’s no need for Zhang shi to pay. You may consider this our way of repaying you for your impartation of knowledge and the pill forging techniques!”

As old elders of the Apothecary School, they had their own stashes of medicinal herbs that they could use whenever they needed. While they might not have extremely valuable saint herbs like the Grand Intermittence Grass in their possession,

the collections they had accumulated over the years were still rather impressive.

Besides, as 6-star pinnacle apothecaries and elders of the Master Teacher Academy, it would be embarrassing if they were to only receive from the other party and not give back to him.

It was just a bunch of medicinal herbs, they each had plenty of those in their stash. It was nothing much for them to just give them away.

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he clasped his fist and thanked them. "I will be thanking you in advance then!"

"Zhang shi, allow me to finish first..." Apothecary Lu waved his hands. "We are able to gather most of the medicinal herbs required, but there is one which you might have to source for yourself."

"Which one?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"It's the last medicinal herb on the list, the 'Phoenix Timber Core'!" Apothecary Lu replied.

"Phoenix Timber Core?" Zhang Xuan frowned. "You aren't able to find this?"

The Phoenix Timber Core was not a saint herb, spirit herb, or even a medicinal herb.

Zhang Xuan had thought that it would be the easiest one to find on the list, which was also the reason he had listed it at the very bottom, but who would have thought that the old elders would tell him that they were unable to obtain it?

"The Phoenix Timber Core is the very foundation of the Phoenix Timber Tree. It has the medical properties of facilitating hemostasis and the recovery of wounds. Compared to the other medicinal herbs, it is indeed not very valuable. However, the problem lies in its rarity... None of us have it in our stash, and it is unlikely that we will be able to find it in the Apothecary School and Physician School either!" Apothecary Lu said.

“If even the Apothecary School and Physician School don’t have them... then where am I to look for it?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

The Apothecary School and Physician School could be said to have the largest collection of medicinal herbs in Hongyuan City. If the Phoenix Timber Core couldn’t even be found in those two places, it was highly likely that it would be impossible to find it anywhere else in Hongyuan City.

“Zhang shi, calm down. While we don’t have the means to procure the Phoenix Timber Core, we do know where you can find it. If Zhang shi is able to convince that fellow, you might just be able to obtain it!” Apothecary Lu said.

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up. “Please enlighten me...”

“The main use of the Phoenix Timber Core is not to serve as a medicine but to craft zithers. If my memory fails me not, I believe there is a Phoenix Timber Tree in the Demonic Tunist School. If you can get to School Head Jiang Qingqin, you might just be able to obtain it!” Apothecary Lu said.

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“Demonic Tunist School?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“That’s right. Once the Phoenix Timber Tree matures, one can procure its wood and soak it in a flowing river for 49 days. The resulting wood is an ideal material for crafting the Seven String Zither. This instrument has an extremely beautiful sound that reverberates deep within one’s soul, making it a treasure which all demonic tunists hope to obtain!” Apothecary Lu explained.

“The current Phoenix Timber Tree in the Demonic Tunist School was planted personally by School Head Jiang Qingqin five hundred years ago. Over the many years, it has been nourished by the rich spiritual energy in the academy, thus making it exceptional material. If we can acquire its core to use in forging the Grand Intermittence Pill, it will definitely augment the medical properties of the formed pill!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan nodded.

He didn’t have much knowledge of the demonic tunist occupation, so he didn’t know there was such a use to the Phoenix Timber Core too.

“Alright. I will find a way to purchase the Phoenix Timber Core from the Demonic Tunist School!” Knowing that he could acquire the material inside the Master Teacher Academy, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“Purchase?” Apothecary School Lu shook his head. “School Head Jiang has always viewed worldly possessions with nonchalance, so I fear that... it won’t be that easy!”

“View worldly possessions with nonchalance?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“In any case, we don’t have any ties with School Head Jiang, and our words also don’t have enough weight to sway him, so I’m afraid that we won’t be able to help you on this matter. Zhang shi, you will have to convince him yourself. For the

time being, I think that you should send him a visiting scroll to indicate that you will be visiting. This will make you seem sincerer, and it might boost your chances of success...”

At which point, Apothecary Lu suddenly laughed dryly and said, “If Zhang shi were to do what you did to the Apothecary School, I fear that it might have the opposite effect...”

School Head Jiang Qingqin was a reticent person, and he usually avoided interacting with others wherever possible. Even though they were the old elders of the Apothecary School, they hadn’t really had much contact with him.

But nevertheless, based on the rumors, they could still fathom a guess on the other party’s temperament, and it didn’t seem like he was an easy person to get along with.

If they were to regard the other party respectfully, they might still stand a chance. But if Zhang shi were to act as he usually did, destroying everything in his path...

“Don’t worry, I am not a reckless person!” Zhang Xuan reassured them.

“ ... ”

However, Apothecary Lu and the others fell speechless after hearing those words instead.

If it wasn’t out of recklessness that you practically crippled the Physician School and Apothecary School, wouldn’t the Master Teacher Academy collapse if you were to get reckless?

Seeing that there was still some time before the agreed time with Luo Ruoxin, Zhang Xuan instructed, “Sun Qiang, make some preparations. We will be heading to the Demonic Tunist School now!”

“Yes!” Sun Qiang hurriedly rushed off to prepare.

Soon, after confirming the direction, the master and butler headed for the Demonic Tunist School.

...

In the Demonic Tunist School, beneath a lush Phoenix Timber Tree, an elder was stroking his zither calmly.

The melodious sound of the zither drifted lightly in the air, and six divine cranes began dancing upon hearing the music. They flew around the courtyard joyously, calling out in excitement.

A long time later, the zither music finally came to an end.

The elder shook his head and sighed. "I'm still a bit off..."

Another elder not too far away stroked his beard and said, "School Head, that's because your expectations are too high. Choir of Six Cranes, that is already a level that countless dream of. In order to reach seven cranes, one has to possess capabilities on par with a 7-star demonic tunist!"

The old man who had been playing just a moment ago was School Head Jiang Qingqin, and the other person with him was Vice School Head Ning Hai.

"These days, I can feel that a breakthrough is imminent, but I just can't find the impetus to do so!" Jiang Qingqin shook his head.

Not too far away, the flying cranes returned back to their flock on the ground.

Demonic tunist, just like the other occupations, could be divided into differing levels of capability. In this case, the more cranes that one was able to allure into dancing merrily in the sky, the greater one's capability as a demonic tunist was.

Jiang Qingqin's feat of inducing six cranes to dance harmoniously to his zither could already be considered an incredible achievement.

"The music of the zither originates from the heart. There's no point getting anxious over it. Perhaps, if you could empty your mind, you might achieve a breakthrough instead!" Vice School Head Ning chuckled.

"That's true... but with so many things going on in the academy recently, it's not easy for me to empty my mind." Jiang Qingqin sighed.

He would have also loved to stay out of worldly affairs and achieve a transcendent state of mind, but as the head of the

Demonic Tunist School, he had many affairs that he had to tend to each day. It was easier said than done.

Furthermore, many troubles seemed to have cropped up within the Master Teacher Academy one after another in recent days. Bearing heavy responsibilities on his shoulders, he couldn't just turn his head away at such a time.

“Indeed!” Vice School Head Ning sighed as he placed his fingers on the zither before him. “Being a school head sure is tough. Even if you offered to hand it over to me for free, I still wouldn't take it! What I want is to roam the world, living joyously and carefree with a zither in hand, unburdened by worldly affairs!”

“You...” Seeing his old friend's state, Jiang Qingqin chuckled and shook his head.

In truth, Vice School Head Ning was nowhere beneath him in terms of his capability, and if he wished to, he was more than qualified to become the school head. However, it was just that he was unwilling to take on the responsibility.

At that moment, a student suddenly rushed into the courtyard.

“Teacher, Zhang Xuan seeks an audience!”

As the student spoke, he passed a visiting scroll over.

“Zhang Xuan?” Jiang Qingqin was taken aback for an instant before the corners of his mouth twitched. “What is he doing here? I don't think... I have any conflict with him!”

“What's wrong? Is there something special about that Zhang Xuan?” Seeing Jiang Qingqin's state, Vice School Head Ning couldn't help but be puzzled.

Even though Ning Hai was the vice head of the Demonic Tunist School, it was more or less only in name. He rarely interfered in the affairs of the school, spending his days playing his zither, immersed in music. Thus, he was unaware of the various affairs surrounding Zhang Xuan.

“Special is an understatement, he is like the God of Destruction. Wherever he goes, unrest follows...” Jiang

Qingqin swiftly brought his old friend up to speed on the matter.

“To think that there would be such a formidable genius in our Master Teacher Academy!” Vice School Head Ning exclaimed in astonishment.

He had heard of master teachers who possessed a particular talent for a single occupation or two, but never had he seen a twenty-year-old freshman overpowering multiple schools in the academy singlehandedly. This was unimaginable!

“But our Demonic Tunist School has no grudge with him, what is he doing here?” Jiang Qingqin’s questioned with an awful complexion.

He was usually extremely easy-going, rarely allowing anything to get to him. But... Lu Feng had described the other party as if he was a monster with six arms, so Jiang Qingqin couldn’t help but feel a little apprehensive at the other party’s arrival.

To visit the Demonic Tunist School for no apparent reason... it couldn’t be that he intended to tear down the Demonic Tunist School?

“Based on what you said... we can’t discount that possibility!” Vice School Head Ning frowned as well.

“Since that’s the case, tell him that I am currently in seclusion, so I can’t meet him,” Jiang Qingqin instructed the student.

“That won’t work! If that fellow resorts to forceful measures after being turned down by you, the Demonic Tunist School might just end up like the other schools...” Vice School Head Ning hurriedly interjected.

“What should we do then?” Jiang Qingqin frowned.

Honestly speaking, that Zhang Xuan was truly a star of calamity. Misfortune fell on whoever was around him. If he had a choice, he would definitely stay as far out of that fellow’s path as he could...

“Why don’t we invite him in for the time being? Since he has delivered his visiting scroll instead of barging in, I think that

there are still grounds for negotiation,” Vice School Head Ning said. “Furthermore, if he is as formidable as you have said, and he has a deep understanding of demonic tunes as well, we could have him offer some pointers to our students, and perhaps, that might lead to a significant rise in the strength of our Demonic Tunist School!”

“This...” Hearing those words, Jiang Qingqin’s eyes lit up as well. “Indeed! This encounter can be considered an opportunity for our Demonic Tunist School too!”

Thus, Jiang Qingqin turned to the student and instructed, “Alright, invite him in!”

Even though Zhang Xuan had a fearsome record of destruction behind him, considering the nature of the demonic tunist examination, it was unlikely that he could do anything to the school. Besides, if the other party possessed true capability, he could even apply for the 6-star demonic tunist emblem for the other party directly.

“Yes!”

The student nodded before leaving quickly. Not too long later, he returned with Zhang Xuan and a plump man.

Zhang Xuan stepped forward and clasped his fist. “Zhang Xuan pays respect to School Head Jiang and Vice School Head Ning!”

On the way here, he had already asked the student about the identities of the duo standing beneath the Phoenix Timber Tree.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony with us, Zhang shi. I have heard much about your affairs. May I ask the reason behind your visit? Our small Demonic Tunist School is unable to take any setbacks, so I have to ask of you to have mercy on us,” Jiang Qingqin said.

“Urk... School Head Jiang, what are you talking about...”

Not expecting the other party to actually take precautions against him right from the start, Zhang Xuan was stunned for a moment. He quickly clasped his fist and replied, “Actually, the

reason I am here today is because I have something to request of you!”

“Oh?”

Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai exchanged doubtful glances, and after a brief moment of silence, Jiang Qingqin turned to Zhang Xuan and said grimly, “As long as you don’t destroy the Demonic Tunist School, challenge the trials here, and have my students join your Xuanxuan Faction... I will definitely do whatever I can for you!”

“Cough cough!” Zhang Xuan choked on his saliva.

What the heck is this!

It was not like I intended to cause all that damage. All I did was challenge those trials fair and square, and yet, everyone treats me as if I am bent on destroying everything I lay my eyes on...

I am not such a person!

But as frustrated as Zhang Xuan was, he didn’t forget the aim of his visit. “The reason I am here is to ask School Head Jiang to spare me some Phoenix Timber Core...”

“Phoenix Timber Core? Impossible! I can’t give you that!” Hearing those words, School Head Jiang immediately waved his hands and rejected him decisively.

When he’d seen how amicable the other party’s attitude was, he had thought that the other party might not be as bad as the rumors had made him out to be. But who knew that the other party would ask for his Phoenix Timber Core... There was no one in the Master Teacher Academy who didn’t know that the Phoenix Timber Tree was his most prized possession!

To actually ask me to give it to you... That’s as good as taking my life!

Why don’t you just kill me instead?

“This... I am willing to pay a premium price on it!” Zhang Xuan offered without any hesitation, knowing the rarity of the Phoenix Timber Core.

“I won’t sell it to you even if you are willing to pay a premium on it...” School Head Jiang shook his head.

“Alright then.”

Seeing how determined the other party was, Zhang Xuan could only sigh helplessly. “Then, may I know where the library of the Demonic Tunist School is and where I can take the demonic tunist examination? I would like to take the demonic tunist examination while I am here...”

“You want to take the demonic tunist examination?”

Recalling the huge calamity that had resulted from the young man before him taking the examinations of the other occupations, School Head Jiang’s lips twitched, and he hurriedly waved his hands. “No way!”

“No way? Is School Head Jiang prohibiting me from taking the demonic tunist examination?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“That’s not it...” Jiang Qingqin’s complexion looks extremely awful, but he had no idea how he could speak about the matter.

In truth, he had no right to stop the other party if the other party wanted to take the examination.

After all, the students had their own freedom to take the examinations as they liked. It was utterly ridiculous for him to prevent a genius from taking the demonic tunist examination just because of his fear.

If so, he would be unqualified to be a master teacher as well.

Seeing that Jiang Qingqin was in a dilemma, Ning Hai discreetly sent a telepathic message to him. “School Head, aren’t you trying to achieve a breakthrough beyond the Attainment of Six Cranes? Considering the incredible reputation of that fellow, why don’t you have him offer you some pointers on your demonic tunes? If he is able to help you reach Attainment of Seven Cranes, there is no harm giving him some Phoenix Timber Core. But if he fails... you will have a reason to turn him down and ask him to leave!”

“This...”

Hearing those words, Jiang Qingqin's eyes suddenly lit up in enlightenment.

Indeed!

Since the other party was able to make all of the teachers and students of the Apothecary School willingly acknowledge him as his teacher, and even Wei Ranxue was completely awed by his teaching, perhaps he might be able to do the same in demonic tunes as well!

Visiting scroll: It is similar to a letter which you send in advance to your visit or right before your visit to indicate your identity so as to give the other party a heads up. It is considered to be polite and respectful.

824 Fly, Divine Cranes

“As long as you can do something for me, it’s not impossible for me to give you the Phoenix Timber Core.”

With such thoughts in mind, Jiang Qingqin regained his confidence.

“Oh?” Curious to know why the other party had suddenly changed his mind, Zhang Xuan turned to look at him.

“Currently, my zither playing can only draw in six cranes. If you can help me reach the Attainment of Seven Cranes within the next two hours, I can give the Phoenix Timber Core to you for free!” Jiang Qingqin revealed his motive.

“Six cranes? Attainment of Seven Cranes? What are those?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered by those foreign terms.

He had never come into contact with any demonic tunist books before, and the other party used professional jargon specific to the occupation, so he couldn’t understand it at all.

“You... don’t know?”

As the other party had said that he would challenge the demonic tunist exam, School Head Jiang had assumed that the other party possessed capability as a demonic tunist on par with him. Yet, to hear him ask such basic questions at this moment... Jiang Qingqin felt his vision turning dark, and he nearly spurted blood.

The hell! These are terms one learns as an apprentice, and yet you don’t know them... Could it be that you don’t know a single thing about demonic tunists?

An amateur like you dared to arrogantly declare that you would take the demonic tunist examination?

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Alright then... Of all demonic tunes, those involving zithers tend to possess the greatest offensive power, so most demonic tunists choose to immerse themselves in the study of the zither.

It also became the basis to judge one's level of attainment as a demonic tunist. The deeper one's understanding of the zither, the more aligned one's zither playing will be with nature, drawing in more divine cranes to dance to one's melody. Under normal circumstances, a 1-star demonic tunist will be able to draw in one crane, and a 2-star will be able to draw in two cranes... so on and so forth. This is also the standard for determining a demonic tunist's capability."

Suppressing his frustration, Jiang Qingqin explained the basic knowledge, which even an apprentice would know. "I am currently a 6-star pinnacle demonic tunist, and I am only capable of charming six divine cranes to dance at once. Seven is still beyond my reach. If you can allow my zither playing to charm seven divine cranes to dance simultaneously... I will give my Phoenix Timber Core to you."

"Seven divine cranes dancing simultaneously?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

"That's right!" Jiang Qingqin nodded. "What I am lacking now is just an impetus for a breakthrough. If you can help me accomplish it, I will agree to your request. Otherwise... I will have to ask of you to leave and never come back!"

"This..."

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before turning his gaze to Jiang Qingqin. "In other words, as long as seven divine cranes dance simultaneously while you are playing, you will accede to my request... Can I interpret it as so?"

"That's right!" Jiang Qingqin nodded.

"That's simple! I won't even need two hours... Just five minutes will do!" Zhang Xuan smiled confidently.

He was still thinking what kind of arduous mission he would be tasked with, but to think that this would be it.

Count on me, I will solve it for you within moments!

The two elders were stunned. "Just five minutes will do?"

Are you for real?

Jiang Qingqin had cultivated diligently for five hundred years only to yet to make the breakthrough to Attainment of Seven Cranes, but you are going to make him achieve it within five minutes?

I thought you didn't even know about the six cranes and seven cranes, are you sure you possess the ability to do so?

If you succeed, putting aside the Phoenix Timber Core, I will even allow you to take the entire Phoenix Timber Tree away with you!

"Of course!" Zhang Xuan reassured with a nod.

"That's good to hear. So, where did I go wrong? Why am I still unable to make a breakthrough after so many years?" Jiang Qingqin was a little hesitant, but as he recalled the unbelievable records the young man before him had achieved, he decided to put his trust in the other party.

Even Vice School Head Ning couldn't help but be curious about what Zhang Xuan was going to do.

To make such big claims, he must have some unbelievable means up his sleeves.

Was this the prowess of a master teacher who had comprehended the Eye of Insight?

"Play the zither!" Zhang Xuan instructed.

"Alright!"

Knowing that he had to first display his capability before the other party could offer him any pointers, Jiang Qingqin's fingers slid across the zither, and a note resonated in the air.

It was like a melody had descended from the heavens, resounding in the courtyard.

The melody mesmerized the listeners in an instant. It was a tune permeated with grandness, as if one had ascended to godhood and was laughing heartily at the world beneath his feet.

Demonic tunist was an occupation specializing in soul attacks. Upon reaching a high level of attainment, one could create an

entire army or a destructive tempest with just a slight flick on the zither, making it difficult for even Saint realm experts to withstand their might.

Legend has it that demonic tunists were once known as divine tunists. But twenty thousand years ago, a 9-star divine tunist found himself deeply encircled by his enemies. With his zither in hand, he drew out demons with his playing to slaughter the million-strong army around him.

That battle had forged the reputation of demonic tunist in the Master Teacher Continent. It was then that everyone learned that the seemingly unimpressive occupation could wield such fearsome power as well, and it was in deference to them that the world had conferred on them the title ‘demon’.

‘Impressive...’

Zhang Xuan had to drive his Heaven’s Path zhenqi before the pressure on his body finally disappeared. He couldn’t help but be astonished.

If he hadn’t been prepared, he might have been left in a trance from the zither music.

It seemed that even the occupations of the Lower Nine Paths held immense potential in them. Otherwise, they couldn’t possibly have been passed down over several dozen millennia without going into decline.

“Hmm?” Jiang Qingqin frowned.

He had been intending to teach the young man a lesson, so he had intentionally added an offensive edge to his playing.

He had thought that the other party would fall in a trance due to his playing, especially given the other party’s low cultivation, but who knew that in a blink of an eye, the other party’s eyes would turn clear? He couldn’t help but be impressed.

It was no wonder the other party could induce such widespread fear around the academy, leaving even School Head Lu in a frenzy. As young as the other party might be, he did seem to possess unparalleled talent and capability.

Hu hu hu!

Impressed, Jiang Qingqin decided to stop with his little tricks, and the zither music abruptly became gentle. Upon hearing the music, some of the divine cranes suddenly began to call excitedly, and they rose into the sky to dance.

One crane, two cranes, three cranes...

Not long later, six cranes were dancing along to the zither music.

Seeing that the zither music could indeed charm the divine cranes into dancing, Zhang Xuan nodded in awe.

As a soul oracle, Zhang Xuan had a deep understanding of the soul. This granted him the ability to induce effects reminiscent of demonic tunes with his words, such as inducing dizziness in another's soul. However, it was still beyond him to charm so many divine cranes into dancing along to a melody.

“Zhang shi, as you can see, I have achieved the Attainment of Six Cranes. However, I am still unable to charm the seventh crane. How should I play in order to make the breakthrough?” Jiang Qingqin's voice echoed resoundingly amid the zither melody.

Despite his advanced age, his voice had a melodious edge to it, reminiscent of singing. It felt extremely comfortable, and it complemented the zither melody beautifully.

“Leave it to me!”

Hearing the other party's words, Zhang Xuan chuckled. He stepped forward, heading to where the divine cranes were loitering around.

Even after six of the cranes had left, there were still ten left in the group. Jiang Qingqin had been taking care of these cranes since they were young, so they were extremely obedient to him. At this moment, they were standing silently on the spot, seemingly enjoying the music.

“Let's begin!”

When Zhang Xuan was around ten meters away from a crane, he stretched his back and took in a deep breath.

Heaven's Path Movement Art! Heaven's Path Fist Art!

With a forceful step, his figure abruptly turned into an afterimage.

Peng peng peng peng!

Ten consecutive punches struck the ten remaining cranes standing peacefully by the side. Their figures retreated rapidly before crashing heavily into the wall of the courtyard, leaving a huge dent behind them.

"..." Jiang Qingqin staggered.

He was still wondering what pointers Zhang Shi was going to offer him when the latter abruptly made his move on his cranes, smashing them into the wall. In that instant, he nearly fainted from fury.

Ding!

In that moment of panic, Jiang Qingqin abruptly exerted too much force, and a string on the zither snapped, created an abrupt disharmonious note. Glaring at Zhang Xuan with eyes that could kill, he roared, "Zhang Shi, what are you doing?"

It was no wonder he was angry. He had taken care of those cranes from their youth, and he had long developed a feeling of fondness for them. Even though he could tell that the other party had held back his punches, leaving a breath in his cranes... still, to pummel his cranes, unforgivable!

"School Head Jiang, please calm down. Continue playing your melody... I will have the seventh crane dancing before you very soon!" Zhang Xuan instructed.

"Very soon?" Jiang Qingqin was slightly hesitant.

You are supposed to offer me pointers so that I can make a breakthrough in my demonic tune arts, but instead of focusing your attention on me, you attacked my cranes instead... Can I really make a breakthrough like this?

"Trust me, you will see soon enough!" Zhang Xuan nodded in reassurance.

“Humph! That had better be the case. Otherwise, you’d better have a good explanation for harming my cranes...” With a livid expression, Jiang Qingqin fixed the snapped string with his zhenqi and began playing once more.

The fellow before him had produced simply far too many miracles, and he had been stuck at the Attainment of Six Cranes for far too long. His eagerness to achieve a breakthrough and the other party’s confidence in his words convinced him to give it another try.

Triinnngg ting tang ting!

A melody that created the vivid imagery of a flowing river deep in the mountains drifted in the air, creating a soothing atmosphere.

Upon hearing the music, the six divine cranes from before began dancing in the air once again.

Seeing how School Head Jiang could quickly keep his emotions in check to play an impeccable tune rich with emotions, Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but nod in commendation. Chuckling softly, he waved his hands and said, “Fly, divine cranes!”

Qiu!

Along with his words, one of the cranes which he had pummeled just a moment ago struggled to its feet, and with a loud call, it leaped into the sky to join the dancing six.

“You... succeeded?”

Vice School Head Ning couldn’t help but widen his eyes in shock.

Wasn’t Zhang Xuan going to offer some pointers to his old friend to help him achieve a breakthrough?

Yet, with just a ‘fly, divine cranes’, his old friend managed to achieve the Attainment of Seven Cranes?

But judging from the melody, it didn’t seem like there was any improvement in his old friend’s playing whatsoever.

Qiu!

Before Vice School Head Ning could make sense of what was happening, yet another crane struggled to its feet. After shaking its head to recover from its dizziness, it abruptly flapped its wings, and with a loud call, it joined the dancing group as well.

“Eight cranes...” Vice School Head Ning’s lips twitched.

Wasn’t his old friend still struggling to charm seven cranes a moment ago? How did it suddenly turn into eight cranes?

Eight cranes... Did this mean that his old friend was on par with an 8-star demonic tunist...

But his old friend’s music hadn’t improved at all, and Zhang shi hadn’t offered any guidance either. Just what was happening before him?

Just as Vice School Head Ning was staring at the sight before him in confusion, a few more cranes struggled to their feet as well, and shaking their heads, they flapped their wings and soared into the sky to join the others too.

“Nine cranes, ten cranes, eleven cranes...” Vice School Head Ning was frenzied by the sight before him.

For a moment, he was so agitated that he could hardly catch his breath.

The highest level a demonic tunist could achieve was the Attainment of Nine Cranes, but at this very moment, there were eleven cranes flying in the air. Not only so, the remaining cranes were showing signs of joining the dance as well...

Just what was going on?

Could Zhang shi really possess such mystical abilities? Even without offering any pointers verbally, he could induce substantial improvement in another with just his glance?

Astonished, Vice School Head Ning hurriedly turned his attention back to his old friend’s playing in an attempt to feel if it had reached a profound level when one of the zither strings suddenly snapped.

Seemingly having realized something, his old friend’s face turned as dark as the stormy clouds, and his hands had

trembled to a stop as well.

The usually composed Jiang Qingqin could no longer hold back his rage anymore, and a furious bellow reminiscent of the howling of a wolf echoed resoundingly in the courtyard.

“Zhang Xuan! Screw you!”

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“What’s wrong?” Seeing his old friend flying into such a rage, Vice School Head Ning was stunned.

It had been five hundred years since he met Jiang Qingqin, and not once had he seen the latter losing his composure before. In fact, there was even one time when a direct disciple of his betrayed Jiang Qingqin, and Jiang Qingqin evicted him from his lineage without the slightest hint of anger on his face...

Yet, at this instant, he was bellowing furiously at a freshman without any regard for his bearings. Just what was going on?

Hua la!

As soon as the melody came to a halt, the cranes in the sky descended back to the ground, and they called out delightfully, as if they had managed to achieve something incredible.

“School Head, so did you achieve a breakthrough or not?” Vice School Head Ning asked curiously.

Demonic tunist was very unlike most other occupations, in the sense that its improvement was not strictly tied to one’s cultivation or skills, but the deeper intent infused into the playing.

Considering that Jiang Qingqin was able to charm so many divine cranes into dancing to his melody, it should mean that the level of his playing had risen significantly. Yet, for some reason, the intent he could feel from it didn’t seem to have reached a higher level, so he couldn’t help but feel a little doubtful.

“The hell with breakthroughs!” School Head Jiang stood up furiously as he glared at the young man in the distance, seemingly tempted to rush forward and tear the latter to shreds.

Vice School Head Ning was unable to comprehend what was going on. “You didn’t achieve a breakthrough? Then why would the cranes...”

It was an unchanging rule that the number of cranes one could charm into dancing would correspond to one’s level of capability. Yet, just a moment ago, he had seen the unbelievable sight of sixteen cranes dancing harmoniously to a melody...

“Why, you ask? That’s because he tamed my cranes!” Jiang Qingqin looked as if he was going to explode.

When he’d seen the other party’s confident declaration, he had thought that the other party might just have some mystical means to help him achieve a breakthrough. Yet, the other party had used some unknown method to tame ten of his cranes instead...

Naturally, a tamed spirit beast would obey the orders of its master, so naturally, they flew at the other party’s command...

“So, that’s what happened...” Hearing the story, Vice School Head Ning also nearly fainted.

What we meant by seven cranes dancing is a breakthrough in one’s capability as a demonic tunist! What use is it for you to tame those cranes and make them dance at your command?

If taming cranes and making them dance can represent one’s capability as a demonic tunist, I would have found a few hundred cranes to do so long ago...

Not expecting Jiang Qingqin to be furious even after he had done what the other party had asked him to, Zhang Xuan frowned. “School Head Jiang, you said it yourself that you will give me the Phoenix Timber Core as long as I can make seven divine cranes dance simultaneously to your melody. Now sixteen of them have done so... it can’t be that you are intending to renege on your promise, can it?”

“Reneged on my promise? Reneged your head!” Jiang Qingqin clenched his jaws so tightly together that it felt that his teeth might chip at any moment, and in that moment, he was on the verge of going berserk.

Never ever have I seen someone as shameless as you!

You are clearly just playing on my words; how can you still speak so brazenly?

What I mean is for you to help me achieve a breakthrough, and yet, you ended up taming my cranes instead...

You hadn't done what I asked you to, and you still dare to ask me for the Phoenix Timber Core?

Not expecting that an esteemed master teacher would suddenly insult him like that, Zhang Xuan harrumphed furiously. "Vice School Head Ning, please help us judge this matter. Didn't School Head Jiang say that as long as seven cranes flew simultaneously to his melody, he would give the Phoenix Timber Crane to me? Does being the school head give one the right to take advantage of another like that?"

"This..." Vice School Head Ning's lips twitched uncontrollably.

Previously, his old friend had said these exact words, "If you can allow my zither playing to charm seven divine cranes to dance simultaneously... I will give my Phoenix Timber Core to you."

Even though the implied meaning was to offer pointers such as to raise his old friend's level of playing, if one were to just look at the meaning of the words itself... Zhang Xuan's interpretation wasn't wrong either!

Sixteen cranes had danced in the air, so technically speaking, the other party had already fulfilled what had been asked of him.

After a moment of hesitation, Vice School Head spoke slowly. "Zhang shi, what School Head Jiang means by seven cranes is the level of his playing... This is jargon commonly used by demonic tunists. While you did manage to make seven cranes dance simultaneously to his tune, the way you did was via the means of a beast tamer. Isn't that twisting the meaning of his request?"

You said that we are taking advantage of you, but you are the one who is bullying us.

What Jiang Qingqin meant was the level of his playing, but you used the means of a beast tamer to ‘resolve’ the problem instead... It doesn’t work like that!

It was only then that Zhang Xuan finally realized what was going on. “Ah!”

He had really thought that it would suffice as long as he could make the cranes dance to the other party’s melody, and he had even asked once again to double check it. But from the looks of it now, the matter wasn’t as simple as he had thought.

It was a communication error...

Considering how valuable the Phoenix Timber Core was, he knew that it couldn’t possibly be so easy!

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan said, “So, what you mean is for me to raise School Head Jiang’s level of playing... You should have said so earlier! Since that’s the case, may I know where the Demonic Tunist School’s library is? I would like to take a look in there!”

He could easily make a thousand divine cranes dance in the air, but to raise the capability of a 6-star demonic tunist... his knowledge was still far too lacking at the moment.

He would have to first read some books in order to gain some understanding of the demonic tunist occupation first.

“Our library?” Hearing Zhang Xuan ask about this matter again, Vice School Head Ning frowned in doubt.

“Yes... I have noticed a few things about School Head Jiang’s current state, but there are still a few aspects that I am still unable to make sense of. I wish to browse through some books to verify certain details first before coming to a conclusion!” Zhang Xuan replied.

The Library of Heaven’s Path allowed him to see through the flaws of another, but it didn’t provide him with the solution. Without any understanding of demonic tunists, there was no way he could come up with a suitable solution to School Head Jiang’s problem.

Only after browsing through some books and reaching the same level as the other party or even higher would he be able to resolve the flaws that the other party had.

However, he could not speak of this matter. Otherwise, he would have been kicked out under the suspicions of being a lunatic, so he could only make up a reason on the spot.

“This...” Vice School Head Ning shot a glance at Jiang Qingqin, who was still furious about the happenings a moment ago.

Vice School Head Ning sent the school head a telepathic message. “Should we let him into our library?”

“If my problem could be resolved just by browsing through books, do you think I would have been stuck at this bottleneck for over five hundred years?” Jiang Qingqin scoffed in skepticism.

“I will reject him then...” Vice School Head Ning replied.

“Wait a moment... It isn’t much of a problem to allow him into our library. How about we do this... Tell him that we will allow him to enter, but if he is still unable to induce a rise in the level of my playing, he can forget about obtaining the Phoenix Timber Core from me!” Jiang Qingqin said. After a moment of hesitation, he added, “Also... he is only allowed to browse through the books. He isn’t to cause any trouble or destruction in the Demonic Tunist School!”

His original intention was to turn Zhang Xuan down, but fearing that he might start demanding to take their examination or challenge their trial the next moment, he swiftly changed his mind and decided to accede to the latter’s request instead.

Since the purpose of a library was for one to enhance their knowledge, it wasn’t a big deal to allow Zhang Xuan in to browse through their books.

But of course, that was assuming that the other party didn’t cause any trouble.

“Alright!” Vice School Head Ning nodded before turning to Zhang Xuan to relay those words.

Hearing that he was allowed entry into the library, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. “Don’t worry, I won’t cause any trouble...”

“The library is around the back; I’ll take you over there!” Vice School Head Ning said as he led the way forward.

Since it would take some time for him to browse through the books, Zhang Xuan had Sun Qiang return to the manor first before following closely behind Vice School Head Ning.

The Demonic Tunist School’s library was significantly smaller than the Apothecary School’s and Physician School’s. With his authority as a vice school head, Ning Hai was able to open the library to Zhang Xuan without requiring a student token or Academic Credits on the other party’s part.

“Thank you, Vice School Head Ning.”

Entering the library, Zhang Xuan saw innumerable books stacked on shelves, and his eyes lit up.

“Alright, I’ll leave you be. If you have any requests, feel free to have any student relay it to me!” Ning Hai said before bidding Zhang Xuan farewell.

Zhang Xuan responded with a nod before turning his eyes back onto the huge collection of books before him.

Possessing the ability to store books into the Library of Heaven’s Path with just a glance, he didn’t need to go through the trouble of flipping through the books like before.

Focusing his gaze, the books on the shelves began appearing in the Library of Heaven’s Path at an incredible speed.

Just like the library in the Terpsichore School, there were hardly any students in here. However, this played just to Zhang Xuan’s liking. It would be a bother if others were to disturb him while he was taking in the books.

One book, two books... one hundred books, two hundred books... one thousand books, two thousand books...

In a few hours, Zhang Xuan managed to successfully take in the several million books stored in the library.

Compiling them, he formed the 1-star to 6-star Heaven's Path Demonic Tune Arts.

I should start reading them now!

As there was no one around, Zhang Xuan simply found a more spacious area and sat there. Immersing his consciousness into the Library of Heaven's Path, he began studying from the 1-star Heaven's Path Demonic Tune Art.

Six hours later, he exhaled a mouthful of turbid air.

At that very moment, his understanding of demonic tunes had already reached 6-star, putting him on par or even above that of School Head Jiang Qingqin.

Since I have attained the capability of a 6-star demonic tuner, I should make use of this chance to take the demonic tuner examination and obtain the 6-star emblem for myself!

In order to make the advancement to a 6-star master teacher, he had to have 6-star emblems in six supporting occupations.

At that moment, he had the 6-star emblems for blacksmith, physician, apothecary, and terpsichore, and he lacked another two.

Since he was already in the Demonic Tuner School, and he had some time to spare, it would be best for him to get this over with.

Thus, he left the library, and after asking around, he headed for the Demonic Tuner Aula, where the demonic tuner examination was held.

Unlike the Tower of Physicians, the Demonic Tuner Aula was a spherical building with an opening at the top, reminiscent of an observatory in his previous life. Those who intended to take the demonic tuner examination would sit at the very front row and play their instrument. The music would be amplified by the walls before echoing up into the heavens. Upon hearing the melody, the cranes residing in the school would fly over and dance merrily to the tune.

After which, the examinee's level of playing would be assessed by the number of cranes drawn in.

Just outside of the Demonic Tunist Aula stood a young man who was currently snoozing on a table.

He was probably the student worker in charge of facilitating the examinations in the Demonic Tunist Aula.

Walking up to the table, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and said, “Senior, I would like to take the demonic tunist examination!”

“You want to take the demonic tunist examination?” The young man rubbed his eyes and took a good look at Zhang Xuan before asking, “What rank?”

“I have never taken the examination before, so I intend to start from the 1-star examination,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Start from the 1-star examination? That’s fine. Here are the music scores used for the 1-star examination. You have to choose a piece from here and play it for the examination. As long as you draw in a single crane with your playing, the Demonic Tunist Aula will automatically award you a pass. You may start whenever you are ready!” the young man said as he passed a file of music scores over.

Only certain scores were allowed in the demonic tunist examinations. One had to display the capability of a 1-star demonic tunist through those specific scores in order to pass the 1-star examination.

“Alright!” After reading through the books in the library, Zhang Xuan had also gained a rough understanding of the typical rules concerning the demonic tunist examinations, so he didn’t have much trouble with that.

However, there was another problem that he faced...

“That... I don’t have a zither with me, so may I borrow one?” Zhang Xuan asked awkwardly.

The young man’s eyes widened in disbelief. “You don’t have a zither? Why are you here if you don’t even have a zither with you?”

A zither to a demonic tunist is like a sword to a swordsman or a brush to a painter. Yet, you wish to take the examination

without even having one in your possession... You must be pulling my leg!

To want to take the demonic tunist without a zither at hand, you really are one-of-a-kind!

“That... I remember that if an examinee doesn't possess a suitable zither, he can borrow one from the Demonic Tunist School...” Zhang Xuan said.

With the books he had read, he had also gained a good grasp regarding the rules concerning the Demonic Tunist School as well.

Based on what he knew, the Demonic Tunist School lent zithers to examinees who needed them, and it wasn't against the rules to do so.

“It's true that you can borrow a zither from our school, but putting aside the fact that those zithers are of subpar quality, they are also extremely old and worn. It's possible that the strings may snap just by exerting the slightest force on them, so your results will not be ideal if you use them... Are you certain about this?” the young man asked doubtfully.

The zithers of the Demonic Tunist School were crafted to only have the bare basics required. Furthermore, they hadn't been used for many years, so they had already gotten rusty. It was questionable whether any of them could play a proper tune or not, and to use one in an examination... the chances of clearing the examination would be unimaginably low.

This was precisely the reason very few people were willing to use it.

“I am certain!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

It would be rather troublesome for him to head out now to purchase a zither, and it was unlikely that he would use it often. Thus, to spare himself the trouble, he decided to simply use the school's zithers.

“Alright then!” Seeing that Zhang Xuan had decided on the matter, the young man shook his head and walked into a room behind his table. Not too long later, he returned with an extremely worn-out zither and a few zither strings.

“Use it carefully. These are spare strings for you to replace with should any snap in the midst of your playing. You have two hours. If you fail to draw a single crane within the time limit, it will mean that you have failed the examination!” the young man said.

In truth, he didn't have much confidence in the fellow standing before him.

How could there be a demonic tunist who didn't even possess a zither of his own?

The fact that he didn't possess a zither likely meant that he lacked practice and that his skills were subpar. Occasionally, he would encounter such arrogant students who had an absurdly optimistic view of their own skills.

“Noted.” Taking the zither, Zhang Xuan paid the fee required for the examination before heading into the Demonic Tunist Aula.

The results for the demonic tunist examination were primarily determined by the divine cranes, so there was no need for complicated formations which consumed a great deal of energy to be inscribed onto the Demonic Tunist Aula. On top of that, there were rarely any examinees around as well.

In order to encourage more students to take the examination, the Demonic Tunist School decided to waive the payment of the Academic Credits and charge only a small amount of spirit stones for the examination.

Walking to the center of the Demonic Tunist Aula via a long passageway, Zhang Xuan found himself surrounded by thick walls inscribed with unique patterns. Zither melodies seemed to resonate with those patterns, amplifying the sound many times over.

However, and fortunately as well, this sound could only be heard by the divine cranes.

There was not a single person in sight within the Demonic Tunist Aula.

Zhang Xuan walked straight up to the round stage at the very center and placed the old zither on the small wooden table

there.

After which, he placed his finger on the music scores and imprinted them into his mind.

“It’s quite a simple tune...” Zhang Xuan chuckled softly to himself.

Having mastered the 6-star Heaven’s Path Demonic Tune Art, his level of playing was currently, at the bare minimum, on par with School Head Jiang. To him, playing the score prepared for the 1-star examination was nothing more than a walk in the park.

“I should give the zither a try first...”

Placing his finger on the zither, Zhang Xuan plucked a string lightly, and a crisp sound reminiscent of a flowing river striking against a boulder sounded.

Even though the sound produced by the zither was lacking in richness, it was at least still usable.

“Alright, time to begin!”

Calming his mind, Zhang Xuan began moving his fingers, and a beautiful melody began permeating the room.

...

In the Demonic Tunist School, School Head Office...

“He didn’t cause any trouble, right?”

Seeing Vice School Head Ning walk into the office, Jiang Qingqin couldn’t help but ask that, his tone tinged with unease.

Vice School Head Ning shook his head. “He didn’t.”

Truthfully, he had also been a little worried previously. This was also the reason he had stood outside the library for several hours to ensure that nothing wrong was going to happen, before he eventually convinced himself that it was safe to leave.

Jiang Qingqin heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s good...”

“However...” At this point, Vice School Head suddenly spoke up hesitantly with a deep frown.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Qingqin hurriedly asked.

Honestly, the rumors regarding that fellow were simply far too frightening. He couldn’t help but pay careful heed to every single action the other party did.

“This morning, he left the library and headed to the Demonic Tunist Aula. If I’m not mistaken, I think he intends to take the demonic tunist examination!” Vice School Head Ning said.

Jiang Qingqin’s eyelids twitched as he asked, “Doesn’t he know nothing about demonic tune arts? Why is he taking the examination?”

“I’m not too sure either... I was fearful that he would wreak havoc, so I secretly followed behind him and watched the situation from the outside. However, I saw the fifteen cranes stationed for the examination flying into the Demonic Tunist Aula, and they didn’t leave while I was there!” With a tight frown, Vice School Head Ning recounted what he had seen.

In order to ensure that the examination could be held at any time, the Demonic Tunist Aula had also reared fifteen cranes of their own.

“They flew into the Demonic Tunist Aula? But even if that fellow is taking the 6-star demonic tunist examination, six should be enough. For fifteen of them to fly in... just what is he up to?” Jiang Qingqin was perplexed.

Fifteen cranes flew over when only six were needed...
Something was definitely amiss!

“I’m also a little bewildered by this matter, that’s why I came here to discuss it with you...” Vice School Head Ning nodded.

“Discuss? This isn’t the time for discussions! We have to rush over to take a look. Otherwise, who knows if that fellow will kill all of our cranes and roast them for his breakfast...”

Recalling the various bizarre feats that young man had accomplished, Jiang Qingqin’s face darkened. He immediately

stood up to rush out of his office, but at that moment, ‘jiya!’, the office doors opened, and a head peeped in around the side.

“That... School Head Jiang, I wish to take the demonic tunist examination, but there aren’t enough cranes around. Can you lend some to me?” Zhang Xuan asked awkwardly.

Jiang Qingqin frowned deeply upon hearing those words.

“How many do you intend to borrow?”

Beside him, Vice School Head Ning also widened his eyes in disbelief.

There aren’t enough cranes around?

You have fifteen cranes over there... Never has the Demonic Tunist Aula received a complaint about having insufficient cranes; why are you the only exception?

Just what in the world did you do to our cranes?!

At that instant, School Head Jiang and Vice School Head Ning felt extremely choked up within.

826 5-star Demonic Tunis

Returning back to the time when Zhang Xuan first began playing in the Demonic Tunist Aula.

As the melody was amplified by the walls, it gradually crescendoed before spilling out from the top.

Qiu!

Not too long later, with a crisp call, a crane flew over. Under the influence of the beautiful melody, it began to dance delightfully.

Great, one came... Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Since a crane had come over, it meant he had cleared his 1-star demonic tunist examination.

Let me see if I can lure two over...

Without changing the score, Zhang Xuan adjusted his state of mind and executed the Heaven's Path Demonic Tunist Art 2-dan. In an instant, the zither melody abruptly became sharp and desolate.

Under normal circumstances, taking the examination of the next rank would require a change in the music score, but Zhang Xuan was too lazy to head out to take it from the young man. In any case, this melody sounded rather pleasant, so he decided to go as far as he could for the moment.

Switching from the Heaven's Path Demonic Tunist Art 1-dan to 2-dan, the intent behind Zhang Xuan's playing suddenly grew much richer, and the sound he produced seemed to have become far more vibrant and resounding as well.

Qiu!

However, the difference in the playing seemed to exert immense pressure on the dancing crane. As if it had suffered some kind of attack, it shrieked fearfully before abruptly plummeting from the sky and fainting.

“This...”

Astonished, Zhang Xuan hurried forward to check on the state of the crane. After verifying that the crane had only lost consciousness, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Could it be that... this music score is unsuited for the 2-star demonic tunist examination? Zhang Xuan scratched his head in confusion.

No, that shouldn't be it. The core of a demonic tune art lies not in the score but in the intent behind it... Perhaps the rise in my intent doesn't complement the music score... If that's the case, it should work as long as I alter the score correspondingly!

Music, just like the dance of a terpsichore, was nothing more than a medium. What stood at the core of demonic tunes was still the intent.

Take painting for example, as long as one reached a profound level of proficiency in their painting skills, one would be able to relay one's intent no matter what one drew; the content of the painting itself served as nothing more than a medium.

What Zhang Xuan was currently experiencing was likely to be the disharmony between the richness of the intent he was relaying and the music score he was using. As long as he made adjustments accordingly, there shouldn't be any problem with it.

Given his current eye of discernment and understanding of demonic tune arts, altering a music score wasn't too difficult for him. Before long, he had managed to alter the melody to suit his current intent.

Thus, his fingers began plucking at the strings of the zither once more.

As he had expected, not too long later, another two cranes flew into the Demonic Tunist Aula and danced above him.

Seeing that it worked, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly in delight.

Having passed the 2-star demonic tunist examination, Zhang Xuan began adjusting his state of mind once more to evoke the

intent of a 3-star demonic tunist when his fingers abruptly moved too forcefully, and ‘pah!’, a string snapped.

As this was the first time he was playing a zither, he failed to keep his strength properly in check, resulting in this unfortunate event...

Padah! Padah!

Yet another two cranes fell to the ground, convulsing uncontrollably. White foam was spilling from the edges of their mouths, and their eyes were rolled back, revealing only the whites.

Somehow, they seemed to exude an aura of indignation, seemingly saying “We have only come over in appreciation of your music, must you do this to us?”...

“Urgh...” The edges of Zhang Xuan’s lips twitched.

He was only taking the 2-star demonic tunist examination, but three cranes had already fainted. He was probably the first one to do so ever since the establishment of the Demonic Tunist School.

But it honestly wasn’t intentional! The quality of this zither was simply too poor!

I mustn’t allow any problems to occur anymore...

Determined to change his image, Zhang Xuan assessed the score and the zither properly, and only after confirming that there wasn’t any problem did he continue to play once more.

As the music permeated the room, it didn’t take too long for three cranes to fly into the Demonic Tunist Aula.

This time, Zhang Xuan had made sure to control his strength properly, so he didn’t hurt any of the cranes this time around. It was also the same for the 4-star examination as well.

However, just as he was just about to make the transition into the 5-star level of playing, he accidentally exerted too much strength again, and ‘pah!’, another zither string snapped.

The sharp dissonance from the snapping of the cranes left the four happily dancing cranes plummeting to the ground.

The zither didn't pose much of a problem for the melodies he had played up to 3-star, but it seemed that it was swiftly approaching the limits of its durability at 4-star.

Furthermore, Zhang Xuan's overwhelmingly powerful soul paired with his lack of proficiency in zither playing made it extremely difficult to control his strength perfectly.

However, knowing that there was no better zither he could borrow, he could only suppress his frustration and continue with the examination. The most he could do at the moment was just to be more careful than before.

Thus, he began making preparations for his 5-star demonic tunist examination.

Upon reaching 5-star, one could be already considered an expert of the Demonic Tunist School. Naturally, the difficulty of the exam was also far harder than those before.

Gathering his focus, Zhang Xuan began plucking at the strings, and a mesmerizing melody resounded throughout the room.

The other cranes seemed to be a little apprehensive at approaching the melody this time around, so they didn't rush over immediately like before. Instead, it was five minutes into the playing when they finally flew over.

Seeing five cranes dancing to his melody above, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

Heaving a sigh of relief, he was just about to come to the end of the tune when 'pah pah!', the zither strings snapped once again, two this time.

Under the abrupt dissonance, the five dancing cranes glared at Zhang Xuan resentfully for an instant and chirped furiously before they followed in the footsteps of the others and plummeted to the ground.

Looking at the twelve unconscious divine cranes lying in his surroundings, Zhang Xuan felt his vision turning dark.

He really didn't do it intentionally!

That darned zither was simply far too lousy to harness the might of his soul!

This was just like having an adult draw a child's bow. The slightest lapse in concentration might cause one to lose control of the weapon.

It was fortunate that the souls of the cranes were only jolted, resulting in a temporary loss of consciousness. Otherwise, if he were to really cripple twelve of the Demonic Tunist School's cranes by taking the demonic tunist examination, School Head Jiang Qingqin just might skin him alive!

Nevertheless, this situation had put him in a dilemma. While Zhang Xuan could wake them up with his means as a soul oracle, his actions would have likely left a trauma in the cranes' mind. Thus, in the short run at the very least, they would be unlikely to be drawn to his music.

In other words, these twelve cranes were incapable of judging his level of playing at the moment.

But nevertheless, I have successfully cleared the 5-star examination, so I am officially a 5-star demonic tunist now... I think I should just get to 6-star in one go! Zhang Xuan thought.

It would be too troublesome to return to the Demonic Tunist School another day, and Zhang Xuan also knew that he had the capability to clear the 6-star demonic tunist examination at the moment as well. Even though the conditions might not be ideal, he still wanted to give it a try.

Thus, he reconnected the snapped strings and adjusted his state of mind before playing once more.

A clear and beautiful melody echoed amid the clouds, and ten minutes later, three divine cranes flew over.

Why are there only three cranes?

Zhang Xuan was certain that he had played at the level of a 6-star demonic tunist, but only three cranes had arrived. He couldn't help but be perplexed by the bizarre situation before him.

He continued playing, hoping that more cranes would arrive soon, but even as he reached the end of his melody, no other cranes arrived around him. Thus, Zhang Xuan could only give up and head out.

It seemed like due to the limitations resulting from the quality of the zither, 5-star was the current limit of his performance. Most likely, he wouldn't be able to clear the 6-star examination that day.

When Zhang Xuan walked out, the young man at the entrance took a look at him, and upon seeing his depressed face, he chuckled lightly and said, "The demonic tunist examination wasn't that easy as you expected, was it?"

"Indeed!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

He had thought that clearing the 6-star demonic tunist examination would be a piece of cake to him, but the tools he had at hand were simply far too poor. It seemed like he would have to find an opportunity to purchase a zither that was suited for him before attempting the examination once more.

"Do you know where I can purchase a better zither here?" Zhang Xuan asked the young man.

"If you want a truly good zither, you will have to craft it yourself. Only then will you be able to tailor it to your own needs and bring out your full potential," the young man explained.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan nodded and replied, "Got it!"

Having read countless books, he knew a fair bit about the crafting of zithers as well. However, he didn't have any time to spare for that at the moment, and there wasn't any good material at hand for that either. It seemed like that would have to wait then.

"Where do I get the emblem from clearing the examination?" Zhang Xuan asked.

While it was regretful that he didn't clear the 6-star examination, it would still be good for him to obtain the 5-star emblem first.

“Emblem? You cleared the 1-star examination?”

The young man was surprised. Nevertheless, he raised his finger and pointed. “You can get your emblem over there. Just place your palm on the wall, and it will give you the corresponding emblem!”

Zhang Xuan walked in the direction where the young man gestured toward, and soon, he found himself standing before a wall.

It seemed to be a mechanism similar to the one in the Ocean of Weapons in the Blacksmith School.

He placed his palm on the wall.

Padah!

An emblem with five shining stars on it fell out.

“5-star...”

The young man who had followed Zhang Xuan, curious to see if he had really cleared the 1-star examination, was shocked to see the 5-star emblem.

To clear the 1-star to 5-star examination in a single go... and to use the old zither from the school at that...

Just how did he do it?

If it was the young man himself, he wouldn't even be able to clear the 3-star examination with a worn zither like that!

Swallowing a mouthful of saliva, the young man said, “You should have told me that you were going to take the 5-star examination... I could have had the cranes prepare themselves for it. Otherwise, even if your zither melody reaches the required level, if the cranes aren't around to hear it, or if there isn't a sufficient number of cranes around, you might have failed the examination...”

“Insufficient number of cranes?” Zhang Xuan was stunned for an instant before a thought struck him. “How many cranes does the Demonic Tunist School have in total?”

“Fifteen!” the young man replied. “The school head has reared a couple of them as well, but they are situated a little far from

the Demonic Tunist Aula, so they aren't able to hear the zither melody and participate in the evaluation of the examination..."

"Fifteen?" Zhang Xuan suddenly realized what was going on.

The reason there were insufficient cranes in his 6-star examination wasn't due to his lacking capability, but that twelve of them were lying unconscious on the ground, and the remaining three were already dancing above him...

There were no more cranes left to judge his performance!

That explained why the final three cranes were staring at him fearfully, seemingly tempted to flee, but mesmerized by the music, they couldn't bring themselves to do so...

"Can insufficient cranes lead to a situation where a qualified examinee fails?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Indeed. The Demonic Tunist Aula determines the examinee's capability based on the number of cranes that have gathered in the surroundings. Naturally, if there aren't sufficient cranes in the area, the Demonic Tunist Aula can only deem it a failure!" the young man replied.

"I see... Thank you for your enlightenment."

Having understood what was going on, Zhang Xuan hurriedly left for School Head Jiang's office.

Since there weren't sufficient cranes in the area, he would just have to borrow three more...

But he couldn't help but be a little worried... Would School Head Jiang be willing to lend his cranes to him?

827 Zither Dissension of the Cranes

Upon understanding what had happened, Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai's eyelids began twitching uncontrollably.

To render twelve cranes unconscious in a demonic tunist examination, you have truly made history today!

After confirming that the cranes had only fainted, Jiang Qingqin heaved a sigh of relief before turning to Zhang Xuan.

"The school zithers are made out of ordinary materials, so they are usually only used in 1-star examinations. Beyond that, examinees are expected to bring their own zithers along with them... I understand your situation. Why don't you use my zither to play here? If six cranes dance to your melody, I will apply for your 6-star demonic tunist emblem personally!"

"Alright!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since the other party had volunteered to apply for the 6-star emblem for him, he was spared an additional trip to the Demonic Tunist Aula. Taking the zither from Jiang Qingqin's hands, he gently brushed his fingers past the strings, and a crisp sound reminiscent of top-quality jades clashing with one another sounded.

"A good zither this is!" Zhang Xuan commended.

Just by listening to the sound produced by School Head Jiang's zither, Zhang Xuan could tell that it was innumerable times better than the old zither he had used previously.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan adjusted his state of mind before beginning to play a light melody.

"A 1-star music score?"

Seeing how that fellow was playing a 1-star music score, both Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai shook their heads. However, just

as they were about to speak, the cranes in the courtyard abruptly flew over.

No more and no less, there were exactly six of them!

“It is actually possible to charm six cranes simultaneously with a 1-star music score?” Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai nearly fainted from shock upon seeing that sight.

A 1-star music score, as the name suggested, was an elementary demonic tune, and it was limited in its prowess. To make an analogy, it was like a Mortal battle technique—no matter how exquisitely one executed it, there was a cap on the prowess one could exert through it.

Even if they were to play a 1-star music score, it wouldn’t be very effective. Yet, the young man before him had actually charmed six cranes into dancing to a 1-star music score...

Was this still the same fellow who knew nothing about six cranes or seven cranes several hours ago?!

To become like this after a night of studying...

Just what kind of monster are you?

It is no wonder you were able to create such a storm in the Master Teacher Academy... your talent is terrifying!

“What if... he uses a 6-star music score?” Vice School Head Ning couldn’t help but wonder at the possibility.

Since the young man was capable of bringing out the prowess of a 6-star demonic tunist with a 1-star music score, what would happen if he were to use a 6-star music score?

Would seven cranes soar into the sky instantaneously?

Would he immediately make the breakthrough to become a 7-star demonic tunist?

With such thoughts in mind, the eyes of the duo immediately lit up.

Thus, at the end of Zhang Xuan’s current piece, Jiang Qingqin flicked his wrist and took out a music score.

“Zhang shi, this is a 6-star music score, Tides of the Spring Moon. Give it a try!”

Zhang Xuan took the music score and looked through it.

As expected of a 6-star music score, it was indeed significantly more complex than the one he had played previously.

However, the complexity also made it easier for him to draw out the richness of the intent he harnessed within.

If he could only bring out 30% of the intent as a 6-star demonic tunist with the previous tune, he could bring out 100% with the one he was currently looking at, or perhaps, if he were to utilize the music score well, it could even go beyond that!

Triiiiing ting tang ting!

After contemplating how he would play the tune, Zhang Xuan laid his hands on the zither once more, and a melody carrying a faint trace of authority within it burst into the surroundings. As if a rising tide, it filled the entire courtyard.

Hearing the zither melody, in a moment of daze, Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai seemed to see a beautiful full moon rising gradually from the water’s surface. Amid the spring night, it brought a dim illumination to the world beneath as the darker side to the world sprung to life.

The spring river coalesced with the calm sea; a brilliant moon rose amid the tides. Shimmering waves charged along with the tides into the horizon, and nary was there a sight devoid of moonlight!

Qiu! Qiu!

The melody grew more and more fleeting, and under the influence of the atmosphere, the cranes soared into the sky.

One crane, two cranes, three cranes...

In the blink of an eye, six cranes were already dancing above Zhang Xuan, seemingly dancing along with the waves, mesmerized by the radiance of the moon.

Hu!

Just as School Head Jiang and Vice School Head Ning were enchanted by the melody as well, the remaining ten cranes by the side called out simultaneously, and one of them soared up to join the dancing six.

But before that crane could even get close, another one leaped up to bite it and dragged it down to the ground.

After which, a second crane spread its wings and prepared to fly up, but before it could lift off the ground, yet another crane rushed forward to stop it.

In the blink of an eye, the remaining ten cranes were tangled in a ferocious fight against one another, unwilling to let each other get ahead of them.

In just a short moment, a rain of feathers had already fallen to the ground, and blood dyed the surroundings red. The cranes, which had lived harmoniously with one another for many years, were currently glaring hostilely at one another as if they were archenemies, dying to tear each other apart with their beaks.

“This...”

Jiang Qingqin’s body couldn’t help but shudder at that sight, and he uttered hoarsely, “This is the phenomenon which only one who has achieved an astounding grasp of demonic tunes can produce... Zither Dissension of the Cranes?”

The capability of a demonic tunist was determined by the number of cranes they could charm with the melody they played. However, if all of them were enticed into dancing, a situation might occur where they competed with one another for the slot.

The divine crane was an extremely proud beast. If they were to see their companions dancing to a melody, they would be reluctant to make a move themselves, unless... the demonic tunist’s level of playing had reached an unbelievable level, inducing an uncontrollable urge within the cranes to dance to the zither melody.

However, there was a limit to the slots. Thus, they could only tussle with one another to fight over it.

Peng! Peng! Peng! Peng!

The ten cranes fought with one another ferociously, determined to become the final one to join the group. After a long and bloodied battle, which resulted in a tragic grave of feathers on the ground, the victorious crane finally flapped its wings and joined the group unsteadily.

But while it had won, it was a miserable victory. Its feathers had nearly all been torn off by its other companions, revealing the crimson flesh and skin beneath.

The dance of a featherless crane—there was not one thing that was divine or graceful about it!

At the end of the music piece, Zhang Xuan finally recovered from the trance he had fallen into in the midst of his playing, and when he saw the bloodied mess from the tragic battle of the ten cranes, he leaped in horror.

What happened while I was playing the zither?

Just as Zhang Xuan was bewildered by the absurd sight before him, he suddenly saw Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai rushing to him with eyes gleaming in excitement.

“This... Does this mean that I have cleared the 6-star demonic tunist examination?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“If this doesn’t constitute a pass, nothing will... Don’t worry, I will apply for the 7-star demonic tunist emblem for you right now!” Jiang Qingqin said.

“7-star emblem?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

“Indeed. Your comprehension of demonic tunes has definitely reached 7-star!” Jiang Qingqin nodded in awe.

To be able to induce the Zither Dissension of the Cranes, his capability was even above that of ordinary 7-star demonic tunists!

Upon hearing that the other party would help him apply for the emblem, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. “Thank you!”

With this, he would have five supporting occupations cleared. As long as he received another 6-star emblem and his

cultivation reached the required level, he would be able to attempt the 6-star master teacher examination!

On top of that, with his comprehension of demonic tunes reaching the level of a 7-star demonic tunist, it would be much easier for Zhang Xuan to help Jiang Qingqin achieve a breakthrough in his level of playing as well.

Activating his Eye of Insight, he began assessing Jiang Qingqin carefully, but a moment later, a peculiar expression surfaced on his face.

“What’s wrong? Is it impossible for me to achieve a breakthrough?” Seeing Zhang Xuan’s expression, School Head Jiang couldn’t help but be worried.

He had thought that it would be easy for the other party to offer him pointers for him to achieve a breakthrough given the level of attainment the other party had achieved, but from the looks of it, he was probably being too optimistic.

But that was no wonder. If it was that easy to make the breakthrough to a 7-star demonic tunist, he wouldn’t have been stuck at a bottleneck for an entire five hundred years.

Seeing the disappointed look on School Head Jiang’s face, Zhang Xuan hurriedly explained the situation.

“It’s not that it’s impossible, but...

“... you have already made the breakthrough. Your comprehension of demonic tunes... has already reached the level of 7-star!”

“I have already made the breakthrough?” School Head Jiang was stunned.

Even Vice School Head Ning was dumbstruck after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words.

Are you for real?

It was just yesterday that I was still stuck at the Attainment of Six Cranes, and I haven’t really done anything since. How and when did I achieve the breakthrough?

“If I’m not mistaken, School Head Jiang must have a transcendent view of worldly affairs. You view all matters with nonchalance, am I right?” Zhang Xuan asked.

Vice School Head Ning nodded in agreement. “School Head Jiang is a very composed person. He is able to retain his calm even in the face of a calamity.”

He had always been in awe of his old friend’s ability to allow nothing to get to him.

“It is not without reason that demonic tunes have such a prefix. In order to truly understand the essence of the word ‘demon’, one has to experience the various vicissitudes of life—birth, death, illness, separation, nostalgia, desire, envy... These are the emotions that provoke us to strive for greater heights... Possessing a transcendent view of worldly affairs mean that your mind has stagnated. As such, how can you expect to reach greater heights?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” Jiang Qingqin fell into deep contemplation.

Five hundred years ago, he had undergone a major event which allowed him to view most affairs with nonchalance. He had thought that he had achieved enlightenment, but from the looks of it, that wasn’t the case.

“Living in the mortal world, it is only normal for us to be involved in and affected by worldly affairs. To pay no heed to them and even avoid thinking about them... that isn’t transcending beyond mortal affairs but escapism! If you have already chosen to escape from everything you face, how can you possibly pave your way forward to accomplish a breakthrough?” Zhang Xuan questioned.

“You’re right...” Jiang Qingqin’s face paled in realization.

The other party was right. To pay no heed to worldly affairs was not enlightenment but escapism!

“There are many experts who would immerse themselves within the vicissitudes of life and experience all kinds of emotions so as to find the impetus to achieve a breakthrough. Yet, you chose to do the opposite. You secluded yourself in your residence, choosing to involve yourself in nothing at

all... That is the reason you have been stuck at a bottleneck for the past five hundred years!” Zhang Xuan sighed deeply in lamentation.

“Yesterday, by taming your cranes, I managed to evoke your anger, resulting in a ripple in your stagnated state of mind, which became the impetus for you to overcome your bottleneck. In other words... you achieved a breakthrough yesterday!”

It was just yesterday that he didn't understand the true difference between six cranes and seven cranes, thinking that it would do as long as he convinced the seventh crane to join in the dance. Who could have known that an unintentional act on his part would actually allow the other party to achieve a breakthrough...

It was indeed a blessing in disguise!

If he hadn't experienced such a matter personally, it would have been hard for him to believe that there could be such a coincidence in the world.

After hearing the lecture, Jiang Qingqin closed his eyes for a brief moment, and the days he had spent over the past five hundred years flashed through his mind in an instant.

The next moment, he stood up, clasped his fist, and bowed. Determination and gratitude could be seen in his eyes.

“Zhang shi, thank you for your guidance. From today onward, in the path of a demonic tunist, you shall be my teacher!”

“This... How can I?” Not expecting that the esteemed head of the Demonic Tunist School would suddenly acknowledge him as his teacher, Zhang Xuan was astonished for an instant before swiftly waving his hands.

“It is proficiency and not seniority that matters in the path of learning! I might have been studying demonic tunes for a far longer time than you, but my comprehension of it still isn't as deep as yours... Your words today have answered a doubt that I have harbored for more than five hundred years. Until you are willing to acknowledge me, I will not rise from my bow!” Jiang Qingqin said persistently.

“This... Alright then!” Seeing the determination and earnestness in the other party’s actions, Zhang Xuan eventually relented.

With his acceptance, the Library of Heaven’s Path in his mind jolted lightly, and a peculiar golden book materialized.

However, this wasn’t the time to be looking at it. Zhang Xuan hurried forward to help School Head Jiang up.

“Teacher, I will chop down the Phoenix Timber Tree now and procure its core for you. As for its trunk, I will craft a suitable zither for you!” School Head Jiang said.

“I’ll be troubling you...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

After which, they chatted awhile longer, and Zhang Xuan offered Jiang Qingqin and Ning Hai some pointers regarding demonic tunes which benefitted the duo greatly.

Two hours later, with the Phoenix Timber Core—which Jiang Qingqin had just had a student procure for him—in hand, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and bade the duo farewell.

However, the moment he stepped out of the Demonic Tunist School, a thought suddenly struck him, and his face warped in shock.

Damn it... I was too concerned with the demonic tunist examination and forgot about my appointment with her!

Gathering the books, studying, and taking the demonic tunist examination... By the time he was done with all that, it was already daybreak. Yesterday, Luo Ruoxin had told him that she would look for him later in the night, but it was already way beyond the agreed timing.

Thus, Zhang Xuan hurriedly returned to his manor, and Sun Qiang hurried forward to report to him.

“Young Master, Lady Luo came last night to look for you, but after learning that you weren’t around, she left...”

“Did she say anything?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Nothing at all...” Sun Qiang shook his head.

“Nothing?” Zhang Xuan scratched his head in bewilderment.

Luo Ruoxin had said that she would look for him last night, but she ended up leaving without saying anything... What was she up to?

“I will head over to her residence to take a look!” Zhang Xuan said.

Returning to the Master Teacher Academy, he found Luo Ruoxin’s residence, and after asking around, he learned that the other party wasn’t in, so he could only return to his manor helplessly.

Even though he did feel a little stifled within due to missing Luo Ruoxin’s appointment, considering that the latter seemed to have some important matter for him, it was likely that she would return another day. Thus, there was no need for him to feel so conflicted over this issue.

In any case, his efforts the previous night had brought him the Phoenix Timber Core, so it wasn’t really a wasted trip anyway. As soon as he obtained the Grand Intermittence Grass and the other medicinal herbs from the old elders, he would be ready to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill.

Under the nourishment of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, even though it wasn’t sufficiently potent to heal Wei Ruyan’s body, it was still able to prevent the state of her physical body from declining any further at the very least. Besides, it would take some more time before the Ten-leafed Flower nurtured her soul to a satisfactory level, so there was no rush at all.

When Zhang Xuan returned to his manor once more, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Now that he finally had some time to himself, he suddenly recalled a fellow who he had been neglecting over the past few days—the Byzantium Helios Beast!

It had been around eight days since he had captured that fellow on Leiyuan Peak, but he hadn’t had any time to interrogate it properly yet. Since he finally had some time at hand, it would be good to coax some news on the Otherworldly Demons from it.

Considering that we are in the center of the city, in the vicinity of the Master Teacher Academy, I should set up a formation to conceal that fellow's aura. Otherwise, I might be noticed by others when I release the Otherworldly Demon puppets on it!

The manor Zhang Xuan was currently residing in was enormous, so there was more than sufficient space to deal with the Byzantium Helios Beast here. However, considering that they were in the middle of a bustling city instead of some remote mountain, it was still imperative to take some precautions so as to ensure that no one would learn of the Otherworldly Demon puppets.

Not to mention, they were extremely close to the Master Teacher Academy as well. Considering the sharp senses that Saint realm experts possessed, it was best not to take his chances.

He was currently a 4-star formation master, so he was familiar with quite a few grade-4 formations. After some searching about, he finally found a suitable one.

This 'Aura Sealing Formation' should do!

The Aura Sealing Formation served to isolate all auras within a set area from the rest of the world.

As long as a Saint realm expert didn't consciously attempt to peek into the area, it would be hard for them to notice what was within the Aura Sealing Formation.

While it was only a grade-4 pinnacle formation, it was currently the best formation capable of concealing auras that he could come up with.

Even though he had experience setting up a grade-6 Hidden Formation in the underground chamber, that formation was incapable of concealing auras or even sound. Given the current circumstances, the Aura Sealing Formation was much more useful.

I should begin!

Taking a swift look at the courtyard, Zhang Xuan swiftly deduced the ideal manner in which he should set up his

formation before abruptly throwing several hundred formation flags out at once.

Hu hu hu!

The flags soared through the air and landed in their corresponding locations simultaneously.

Weng! The formation came to life.

Hundred Flags of Void Sealing!

“Alright...”

Seeing that the formation had been set up, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out the Myriad Anthive Nest, and the next moment, a massive ape saint beast appeared on the ground.

After being trapped for over a week, the Byzantium Helios Beast was finally released from its confines!

828 Byzantium Helios Beast, Found

“Faction leader, after Zhang shi left School Head Jiang’s residence, he returned straight to the manor which King Huai gave him. After which, he headed to Luo shi’s residence but left shortly after. Since then, he hasn’t left his manor!”

In the courtyard of a vast residence sitting at the very center of the Formation Master School, a young lady reported to a beautiful silhouette before her.

Dong Xin turned around and asked, “He hasn’t left his manor?”

Ever since the affairs at the Physician School, she had been sending her men to trail Zhang Xuan so as to uncover his weaknesses, but the latter had been so busy that it was hard to even catch a glimpse of him. So far, she still hadn’t received anything that she could use against him.

“Yes!” The other lady nodded in response.

“Alright, you may leave now.” Dong Xin waved her hands casually before placing them behind her back.

A slight spring breeze tugged at her robe, highlighting her mesmerizing figure.

She lived up to her name as one of the top beauties of the academy. Her posture and gestures carried a unique charm to them.

If Hu Yaoyao was a thorny rose, she would be an elegant lily, cold but alluring.

“One has to enter the tiger’s den to find a cub. If I wish to uncover that fellow’s weakness, I will probably have to make a move myself!” Dong Xin’s eyebrows shot up.

She was an extremely careful and meticulous person, and she didn’t like to depend on secondhand news. Even though she

had heard many things about Zhang Xuan from Hu Yaoyao and the others, she still held her reservations toward the authenticity of their words, choosing to devote significant resources to investigating him herself.

However, perhaps it might be due to Zhang Xuan being far too careful, her subordinates had been unable to obtain any useful intelligence on him yet. It seemed like she would have to make a move herself if she wished to find anything useful.

“Alright, I should head over to take a look!”

Switching to an ordinary robe, Dong Xin flitted out of her residence.

She had already tasked someone with uncovering the location of the manor which King Huai had given Zhang Xuan, so she knew its exact location. It wasn't located too far from the Master Teacher Academy, so she arrived at her destination within a few minutes.

It seems like there are quite a few formations set up here... However, you are being too naive if you think that this can stop me! Chuckling lightly, Dong Xin infiltrated the manor.

She was one of the top Grade 5 students in the Master Teacher Academy, a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan Chrysalis realm expert. On top of that, she was the direct disciple of Chen Chengxun, the head of the Formation Master School.

The formations in the manor might have been able to stop 4-star and 5-star formation masters in their tracks, but to hinder her passage? Dream on!

Slowly advancing carefully in the manor, Dong Xin soon found herself standing before a vast courtyard.

A formation was currently active in the courtyard. It created a thick layer of mist around the courtyard, preventing one from seeing what was within.

Dong Xin recognized it with a single glance. This is... a 4-star pinnacle Aura Sealing Formation?

The purpose of the formation is to conceal one's aura... Could it be that his weakness is hidden within here?

Dong Xin's eyes lit up in excitement.

The Aura Sealing Formation didn't have much practical use other than concealing one's aura. For the other party to set up such a formation within his manor, there was no doubt that he was trying to hide something!

I must find a way to get through the Aura Sealing Formation to take a look... Dong Xin clenched her fists tightly in agitation.

Her enemy's secret, and possibly his greatest weakness as well, was standing right before her. She couldn't let this opportunity slip through her fingers. Gritting her teeth ferociously, she began analyzing the formation carefully with her beady eyes.

It isn't too difficult to decipher a grade-4 Aura Sealing Formation, but if I make a wrong move, I might end up shifting the formation flags and cause some unexpected changes in the formation...

As a 6-star formation master, Dong Xin was more than able to overcome an Aura Sealing Formation. However, the tricky part was to sneak in without the other party noticing.

To do so, she would have to study the formation thoroughly and plan out her moves carefully.

With a swift movement, she leaped onto a lush tree in the corner of the courtyard to conceal herself. After which, she took out a geomantic compass and began making her calculations based on the spiritual energy flow in the surroundings.

Li San, Xun Wu...

Dong Xin swiftly performed her calculations, and the more calculations she made, the more awed she became.

The person who set up this Aura Sealing Formation is a person of great capability. He managed to align the formation perfectly with the entire manor, turning the two into one entity. Even I am unable to achieve such a feat...

Even though the formation before her was only at grade-4 pinnacle, it was perfectly aligned with the surroundings, drawing out prowess that only grade-5 formations could possess.

To be able to bring out such prowess in a grade-4 formation, the other party's capability as a formation master could only be above hers.

But ultimately, there's still a limit to how powerful a grade-4 formation can be. No matter how well he might have set it up, as long as I find the Life Gate, I will still be able to get in easily... Dong Xin chuckled softly in confidence.

Her talent in formations was extraordinary, and this was also the reason the head of the Formation Master School had taken her in as his disciple.

The formation might be far beyond the normal scope of an ordinary grade-4 formation, but due to its fundamental limits, she was still able to decipher it easily.

Taking a deep breath, she was just about to confirm the location of the Life Gate and sneak in when the ground suddenly shook intensely. A violent energy burst out from the formation.

It felt as if a powerful expert was trying to break the formation from within to escape.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Dong Xin swiftly hid herself before she heard yet another powerful shockwave striking the Aura Sealing Formation. Under the immense force, 'pili pala!', the formation began to crumble.

To be able to destroy a grade-5 formation with brute force... the person trapped inside the formation must be at least a Saint realm expert! Dong Xin narrowed her eyes in astonishment.

While the Aura Sealing Formation was meant to be a grade-4 pinnacle formation, the person who had set it up had done it so impeccably, complementing it perfectly with the surroundings, that it harnessed the prowess only grade-5 formations should possess.

For a grade-5 formation to crumble under brute force, it could only mean that the person trapped within was an unbelievably powerful expert.

Boom!

Amidst her shock, Dong Xin saw an enormous figure emerging from the crumbling formation.

This is... Senior Byzantium Helios?!

Her body immediately stiffened from sheer astonishment.

As a Grade 5 student, she had been fortunate enough to meet the tamed beast of the old principal several times... But wasn't he kidnapped by the Otherworldly Demons?

How can he be here?

Or could it be...

The thought that just flashed through Dong Xin's mind filled her with unprecedented horror.

"Trying to escape? Vicious, take it down!"

In the next instant, a nonchalant voice suddenly sounded in the courtyard, and an overwhelming killing intent permeated the area.

Padah!

Before Senior Byzantium Helios could even react, he had already fallen back to the ground, convulsing uncontrollably.

It's... the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe! Dong Xin was so frightened that she didn't even dare to move in the slightest.

"The rest of you, get him! Pummel him to death!"

Following which, the nonchalant voice sounded once more, and twenty Saint realm Otherworldly Demons abruptly appeared and charged furiously toward Senior Byzantium Helios.

Pili pala!

Fists and kicks sunk into the flesh of the helpless Senior Byzantium Helios, and in the blink of an eye, he was already

bruised all over. He lay on the floor twitching uncontrollably, and it felt like he could breathe his last at any moment.

Covering her mouth firmly to stifle her gasp, Dong Xin felt her blood run cold. In that instant, she dared not to make the slightest movement or noise for fear of being noticed.

The enemy side had twenty Saint realm Otherworldly Demons, and even Senior Byzantium Helios wasn't a match for them. If she were to be noticed, there was no doubt that she would be slaughtered in an instant.

“It fainted again...”

Through the gaps of the leaves, she saw Zhang Xuan walking leisurely toward Senior Byzantium Helios and harrumphing coldly. He flicked his wrist, and the massive Senior Byzantium Helios abruptly disappeared from sight. After which, he looked at the broken formation and fell into deep thought.

“This formation is too weak... It seems like I should head to the Formation Master School to learn a more formidable formation...” Zhang Xuan muttered under his breath before walking back to his room.

Even after Zhang Xuan had disappeared from sight, Dong Xin didn't dare to move, fearing that the other party might return abruptly. It was only six hours later, when dusk had finally set in, that she dared to move her stiffened body and swiftly flee from the manor.

The matter she had seen that day was truly huge!

It was so huge that it terrified her to her very core!

It was no wonder Zhang Xuan was so talented, skilled in every aspect... It turned out that he was really not a human!

It was said that the royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe possessed the capability to disguise themselves as humans, and not even Saint realm master teachers would be able to tell the difference. When she'd first heard of it, she had thought of it as utter nonsense — how could such a convenient ability exist in the world? — but to think that... it would actually be true!

For an Otherworldly Demon to disguise itself as a master teacher and even successfully infiltrate the Master Teacher Academy... This news would cause not only a huge uproar in the Master Teacher Academy but the Master Teacher Pavilion as well!

Realizing the implications behind this issue, Dong Xin rushed straight to the Master Teacher Academy as fast as she could. This won't do, I can't let his schemes succeed! I have to report this matter to the academy this instant...

This was no longer something that she, as a student, had the power to deal with. She had to inform the top echelons of the Master Teacher Academy as soon as possible.

But... given how astounding this matter was, would anyone believe her?

After all, that Zhang Xuan had earned the deep trust of School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, School Head Wei, and just a few hours ago, even that of School Head Jiang! On top of that, he was also a close friend of Pavilion Master Mo, and he seemed to have an amicable relationship with Luo Shi from the headquarters too...

If she were to accuse him of being an Otherworldly Demon without concrete evidence, not only would others not believe her, she might even be stripped of her master teacher license on the grounds of slandering her own peers!

I should first discuss this matter with teacher... Dong Xin thought.

As the person who had founded the Dong Xin Faction and led it to become one of the strongest student factions in the academy, she was by no means a reckless or foolish person.

Even though it had only been a matter of days since Zhang Xuan had enrolled at the academy, he had already won the trust of several dozen thousand students along with four school heads and Pavilion Master Mo... Her current standing was in no way on par with his.

Under the circumstances, since there was no concrete evidence to back her words, she was in a definite disadvantage on this

matter. It was highly likely that the tables would turn on her, and perhaps... her life might even be threatened!

Thus, it was imperative for her to act cautiously and even more carefully for this matter.

But even if teacher were to trust me, his standing is still beneath that of School Head Zhao. That won't be sufficient to overthrow Zhang Xuan...

A figure suddenly surfaced in Dong Xin's mind. Wait, I can look for School Head Lu Feng!

While it was true that her teacher Chen Chengxun, the head of the Formation Master School, did possess immense prestige in the Master Teacher Academy, his standing was still beneath that of Zhao Bingxu. If Zhao Bingxu were to oppose to the motion that her teacher raised, it was highly likely that the entire matter might fall through.

However... things would be different if she could rally the stand-in principal, Lu Feng, to her side!

Lu Feng and Zhang Xuan had a hostile relationship, so Lu Feng might be inclined to listen to her words.

I should first find teacher and have him take me to School Head Lu Feng... Dong Xin gritted her teeth in determination.

The implications behind this matter were simply too huge. The matter wouldn't just resolve itself if she only revealed what she had seen. She had to gather sufficient power on her side first.

And at this very moment, the person who wielded the greatest say in the academy was indubitably School Head Lu Feng.

On top of that, the other party had a grudge against Zhang Xuan, so if she were to reveal this news to him, it was likely that the other party would side with her.

Hu!

Having made up her mind, she headed toward the school head office of the Formation Master School without any hesitation. These are the divinations of the eight trigrams.

829 I Am the Old Principal's Tamed Beast!

Not knowing that Dong Xin had already discovered the secret regarding the Byzantium Helios Beast, Zhang Xuan was currently making his way over to the Formation Master School.

Even though he had set up his Aura Sealing Formation impeccably, the formation's grade was ultimately still too low.

While the Byzantium Helios Beast was tightly squeezed inside the Myriad Anthive Nest, it was still a saint beast with incredible regenerative capability. In just a few days, it had mostly recovered from the wounds it had sustained previously.

Thus, as soon as it was released in the courtyard, it exerted its full might to break the formation so as to escape.

It was fortunate that Zhang Xuan had expected such a situation and had prepared in advance for it. Through utilizing the strength of Vicious and the Otherworldly Demon puppets, he had managed to subdue it eventually.

However, that wasn't a feasible solution in the long-run.

Zhang Xuan had no choice but to take the Byzantium Helios Beast out in order to interrogate it on the affairs of the Otherworldly Demons, but if he couldn't trap it properly with his formation, it might just end up escaping while his guard was down one day.

Furthermore, the shattering of the Aura Sealing Formation meant that it was possible for the aura of the Otherworldly Demon puppets to escape, and he might potentially draw in the Saint realm experts of the academy as a result of it. If that were to happen, it would be difficult for him to explain himself.

After much contemplation, Zhang Xuan decided that he should first study a higher grade formation just to be safe.

Thus, he left his manor, and before long, he was already in the Formation Master School.

I should start with the library first!

After confirming the location of the library from the passers-by, he found a small gazebo in its vicinity, sat down in there, and drew his soul out.

The Formation Master School was ranked third in the entire Master Teacher Academy. There was a constant flow of people going in and out of its library, a sight that one would never see in the Terpsichore School or the Demonic Tunist School.

It didn't take too long for Zhang Xuan to get into the library.

As he was currently a 4-star formation master, he decided to skip the books in the lower levels and head right up to the fifth floor.

Hualala!

As his gaze swept over the shelves, book after book swiftly appeared in the Library of Heaven's Path.

In four hours, he had already finished taking in all of the books on the fifth and sixth floors, and he compiled them to form the 5-star and 6-star Heaven's Path Formation Art.

After he was done, he quickly returned his soul to his body and began studying.

When Zhang Xuan finally opened his eyes once again two hours later, there was a bright gleam in them.

At that very moment, his comprehension of formations had reached the equivalent of a 6-star pinnacle formation master. Even against the head of the Formation Master School, he was confident that he would be able to stand his ground.

Should I take the 6-star formation master examination while I am here?

Standing up, Zhang Xuan contemplated with his right hand stroking his lower jaw.

If he could receive a 6-star formation master emblem as well, he would have cleared one of the main prerequisites to the 6-

star master teacher examination.

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan decided against it. Forget it, I have been taking too many examinations recently. If I continue at this pace, I might just end up drawing doubts upon myself, and that would be troublesome. For the time being, I should focus my effort on interrogating the Byzantium Helios Beast!

He had taken quite a lot of examinations in recent days—blacksmith, terpsichore, physician, apothecary, demonic tunist... The matter had caused a huge uproar in the Master Teacher Academy. Since his cultivation was still too low to take the 6-star master teacher examination, it might be good for him to slow down for the time being.

Once the current heat had dissipated, he could continue as he pleased.

In any case, his knowledge couldn't possibly escape from him. It would make no difference whether he took the examination now or later.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan returned straight to his manor.

He walked directly to his courtyard and took out a few formation flags to set up a grade-6 Breath Isolation Formation.

When he was finally done, he took a look at the work he had just achieved and nodded in satisfaction.

Unlike other grade-6 formations, which were impossible to successfully set up without reaching Chrysalis realm or even Half-Saint, the Breath Isolation Formation could be set up even by those whose cultivation wasn't up to par.

Zhang Xuan had done some calculations, and he had realized that even if the Byzantium Helios Beast was in its peak state, it would still be unable to break the formation. With this, Zhang Xuan would no longer have to worry about anything escaping from it.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan stepped into the formation and deployed the Otherworldly Demon puppets in the surroundings. After this was done, he released the Byzantium Helios Beast.

“You... If you want to kill me, just do it!”

By this point, the Byzantium Helios Beast had already awoken from its previous unconsciousness. It lay motionless on the ground as it glared at the young man before it with deep resentment.

As the tamed beast of the old principal, when had it ever suffered like that before?

If only it wielded sufficient power in its hands, it would have surely ripped the fellow before it into shreds!

“If it was my intention to kill you, I would have already done so on Leiyuan Peak. There would have been no need for me to keep you alive until now!”

Zhang Xuan waved his hands coldly. “If you don’t want to suffer, you’d better reveal your motive for harming the thirty thousand examinees and the mastermind behind you... If you do so, I can consider sparing your life. Otherwise, believe me, I will make every single day of yours a living hell!”

This fellow was unlike the Ancient Ape on the Cloudmist Ridge.

Soul Search was not an infallible technique. The main reason Zhang Xuan had been able to successfully use it on the Ancient Ape was due to the latter’s fear of him, and the unstable state of mind made it easier to peer into his memories. On the other hand, the Byzantium Helios Beast had a headstrong and loyal personality. Considering how it hadn’t spoken a word despite being pummeled again and again, there was a good chance that Soul Search may fail on it.

If that was the case, Zhang Xuan would lose the only lead he had on the Otherworldly Demons!

Honestly speaking, he also couldn’t help but feel deeply helpless against this fellow.

“Make my life a living hell? Do you think that I’m afraid of that?” the Byzantium Helios Beast roared furiously.

“My master was killed by Otherworldly Demons like you! You want me to submit to the likes of you? Not in a million years!”

Its master had devoted his life to fighting against the Otherworldly Demons, and having accompanied by its master’s side for many years, the Byzantium Helios Beast had inherited his moral compass. It had a clear notion of what it should do and what it shouldn’t do.

If it were to side with the Otherworldly Demons, it would be too ashamed to continue living in this world!

Rather than live without honor and dignity, it would rather die!

“Your master was killed by Otherworldly Demons?” Zhang Xuan frowned. “What do you mean by that?”

The Byzantium Helios Beast harrumphed. “Your deception is meaningless! You are royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, right? Only the royalty can conceal their aura perfectly and disguise themselves as master teachers without catching the notice of others!”

“Disguise as master teachers?”

Zhang Xuan burst into laughter. He was intending to interrogate the other party on the whereabouts of the Otherworldly Demons, but to think that he would end up being framed by the other party instead...

“Do you think that you can prove your innocence by fabricating such lies? To control so many spirit beasts to attack the examinees of the Master Teacher Academy, even a fool can tell that you have malicious intentions in mind. Who else can you possibly be working for if not the Otherworldly Demons?” Zhang Xuan sneered coldly.

“Attack the examinees? Malicious intentions?” The short-tempered Byzantium Helios Beast’s face turned scarlet upon hearing the accusation. “I was invited by School Head Mo to facilitate an examination for the examinees, how is that a malicious intention?”

“Facilitate an examination? You had the Myriad Anthive Queen track down the whereabouts of the students so that the spirit beasts could lay a trap for them to step into... can that even be called an examination? If I hadn't discovered it in time, who knows how many students would have lost their lives!” Zhang Xuan sneered disdainfully.

Seeing that the other party was trying to soil its honor, the Byzantium Helios Beast explained indignantly, “Those spirit beasts were captured by School Head Mo, and I had already warned them against killing any of the examinees! The purpose of the examination was to dampen their arrogance and have them understand that the strength of master teachers lies in their collectivity, not the individual!”

Even at death, it would die an honorable beast. It wouldn't allow anyone to frame it of anything.

“There's such a way of going about it too?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

At this point, he suddenly couldn't help but recall the situation back when he was still on the Leiyuan Peak, when he encountered two hundred master teachers surrounded by four hundred spirit beasts. While the situation seemed perilous then, thinking back... it was indeed bizarre how there were no casualties. Could it really have been part of the examination?

If that was the case... could it be that he had misunderstood the Byzantium Helios Beast?

“You... are acquainted with School Head Mo?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Of course! I am the tamed beast of the Master Teacher Academy's old principal. How could I possibly not know who School Head Mo Zhu is?” the Byzantium Helios Beast said with clenched jaws.

“You can kill me, but don't even dream of prying my mouth open!”

“The tamed beast of the old principal...” Zhang Xuan's mouth twitched upon hearing those words.

During his time in the Master Teacher Academy, he had heard that the old principal's tamed beast had disappeared, and back then, he had thought that it was the doing of Otherworldly Demons...

To think that the culprit... would be him instead!

Oblivious to Zhang Xuan's shock, the Byzantium Helios Beast roared resolutely, "Indeed! My master might have already left me, but there is no way that I will side with Otherworldly Demons! Impossible!"

"Side with Otherworldly Demons... Are you saying that I am an Otherworldly Demon?" Zhang Xuan asked with a bizarre look on his face.

"Is that not it? To be protected by the will of an Otherworldly Demon expert and so many Otherworldly Demon puppets... Who else can you be if not an Otherworldly Demon!" the Byzantium Helios Beast spat.

"This..." Glancing at the Otherworldly Demon puppets in the surroundings, Zhang Xuan blinked in a daze.

If one were to see so many Otherworldly Demon puppets all of a sudden without knowing the inside story, they would indeed assume that to be the case...

It seemed like the entire matter was just a huge misunderstanding...

He had thought that the Byzantium Helios Beast was a subordinate dispatched by the Otherworldly Demons to harm the Master Teacher Academy's examinees, and the other party thought that he was royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe...

What the heck!

If he'd known this was a misunderstanding, he would never have been so harsh on the Byzantium Helios Beast!

Taking a look at the other party's state, it didn't even look like a beast anymore...

Recalling the sight of how his puppets had pummeled the other party viciously just earlier that afternoon, Zhang Xuan's

lips twitched uncontrollably...

It seemed like... somehow, things had gotten out of hand.

In terms of standing, the tamed beast of the old principal was comparable to a school head. To pummel the other party viciously, leaving it on the verge of death multiple times... If others were to learn of it, he would be a goner!

The entire academy would be raising their pitchforks toward him, hunting him down to the ends of the world.

Currently, there are only two solutions before me. One is to kill the other party and ensure that no one learns that I am the culprit. The other is to tame it and make it my tamed beast. Otherwise, it will surely rally others against me as soon as I set it free! Zhang Xuan's mind swiftly whirred into action upon realizing that this was a huge misunderstanding.

Given the other party's standing, even if Zhang Xuan were to prove that he wasn't an Otherworldly Demon, there was no way it would be willing to let Zhang Xuan off the hook just because he had left it on the brink of death multiple times. If he were to release it, there was no doubt that he would be in for a round of misfortune.

The easiest and safest way out of this was to... just kill the other party!

I can't. I should try the second solution instead!

It was admirable and touching how the Byzantium Helios Beast refused to budge even in the face of death, choosing to take the secrets of humanity with it to its grave instead. It was one thing if Zhang Xuan was unaware of it, but now that he had learned of it, he would surely regret it for life if he were to kill the other party.

Taming might be difficult, but Zhang Xuan felt that it was the only acceptable solution out of this mess.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan exhaled deeply before turning to the Byzantium Helios Beast and said, "I am not from the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. I am a real master teacher!"

“Stop putting on an act here, do you think that I’ll believe you?” The Byzantium Helios Beast didn’t believe Zhang Xuan at all.

If the other party wasn’t an Otherworldly Demon, how could he have so many Otherworldly Demon puppets protecting him? On top of that, the will of an Otherworldly Demon expert had even pledged loyalty to him...

Don’t even think that you can fool me that easily just because I am a beast...

Zhang Xuan shook his head and sighed. “Consider our plight, is there really a need for me to lie to you? I really am not an Otherworldly Demon. There is a huge misunderstanding between us!”

The next moment, the aura that Zhang Xuan exuded abruptly changed. In that very instant, his presence felt like an inviolable deity from the heavens, a figure whose authority one could never challenge.

“This is...”

Sensing the aura, the Byzantium Helios Beast was bewildered briefly. Then, a thought struck it, and its eyes immediately widened in astonishment.

“You are... a Celestial Master Teacher?”

830 Byzantium Helios Beast Acknowledges Its Master!

The old principal had once told it that the most formidable master teacher was the Celestial Master Teacher.

Acknowledged by the heavens, the Celestial Master Teacher commanded an aura that compelled others to acknowledge them as their teacher.

In history, only Kong shi had reached such a peak before. Could the man before it be one as well?

“That’s right!”

Zhang Xuan nodded. “Do you think that a Celestial Master Teacher can be an Otherworldly Demon?”

The Byzantium Helios Beast hurriedly shook its massive head. “Of course not...”

The Celestial Master Teacher was a master teacher acknowledged by even the heavens, an existence on par with Kong shi. How could he possibly be an Otherworldly Demon?

Those two were from two completely different worlds!

Seeing that the other party had recognized his identity, Zhang Xuan’s face immediately darkened. “Even the heavens have recognized me, but you showed me no respect at all, assaulting me even... Do the heavens mean nothing to you? Does Kong shi mean nothing to you?”

If he wanted to tame the other party, he had to claim the moral high ground first. Thus, he had to pin the blame on the other party.

Besides, it was a fact that the other party was the first to make the move. Had Zhang Xuan not possessed several means up his sleeves, their roles at this very moment would have been reversed.

“I...” the Byzantium Helios Beast’s face flushed crimson.

Back then, it was just thinking of scaring the arrogant freshman before it to instill humility into him, but who could have known that... the other party was actually a Celestial Master Teacher!

In the whole of history, there had only been one Celestial Master Teacher—Empyrean Kong shi. Even the 72 Sages, his direct disciples, had never achieved such a height... This went to show how fearsome an existence a Celestial Master Teacher was!

In other words, it had attempted to assault a master teacher who was innumerable times more noble than the old principal... It was no wonder the other party had taught it a lesson!

It should already count its blessings that it hadn't been reduced to meat jerky!

Even though the other party's cultivation was currently weak, just by this identity in itself, even if the other party were to destroy the entire Master Teacher Academy, there wasn't anyone who would dare punish him for that.

Celestial Master Teacher, an existence equivalent to Kong shi, which master teacher would dare to refute his actions?

Seeing that he had managed to instill fear into the other party's heart, Zhang Xuan swiftly pushed on with the momentum. "It's due to your disrespect toward me that I imprisoned you and taught you a lesson. Do you harbor any grudges against me due to that?"

The Byzantium Helios Beast swiftly shook its head in denial. "I dare not..."

A Celestial Master Teacher was the hope to furthering mankind's rise. Even if the old principal were in its place, he would not dare harbor a grudge toward the other party.

This was the special privilege that a Celestial Master Teacher possessed!

"Good! Since the misunderstanding between us is dispelled, I shall give you two options. One, acknowledge me as your master and I will treat your wounds and help you achieve a

breakthrough in your cultivation. Two, since you've found out about my identity, in order to prevent the news from leaking... I can only silence you for good!" Zhang Xuan said impassively with his authoritative gaze pressurizing the other party.

His identity as a Celestial Master Teacher could not be made known to others easily. It was one thing if his fellow master teachers were to learn of it, but if the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe were to catch hold of that news somehow, he would become a target for them to hunt down!

Due to that fear, Zhang Xuan refused to reveal his identity to anyone, not even to his fellow master teachers. Those who knew about it had sworn to maintaining secrecy about it.

"This..." The Byzantium Helios Beast was conflicted.

After a moment of hesitation, it gritted its teeth and replied, "I will acknowledge Zhang shi as my master!"

It was not out of fear for its life that it chose this decision, but... since the person before it was a Celestial Master Teacher, the heights that he would surely reach were unthinkable. Perhaps, he might be able to exact vengeance for its master!

"Since you have decided to acknowledge me as your master, I will give you my word too then. As soon as I possess sufficient strength, I will investigate the true reason behind the old principal's death and avenge him!" Zhang Xuan also noticed the Byzantium Helios Beast's intentions, and he gave his word.

"Thank you... master!" Seeing the other party promising it of the matter even before it could speak, the Byzantium Helios Beast's eyes reddened in agitation. It immediately kneeled to the floor, and a droplet of crimson blood seeped out of its glabella and into Zhang Xuan's glabella.

The formation of the contract!

"Rise!" Having averted one possible calamity, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

Stepping forward, he placed his palm on the Byzantium Helios Beast's body and infused the pure Heaven's Path zhenqi into it.

Within just a few moments, the latter's heavy wounds had vanished without a trace.

"This..." The Byzantium Helios Beast widened its eyes in shock.

As a Saint realm expert, it could clearly sense the unique nature of Zhang Xuan's zhenqi. Not only was it unbelievably pure, it also carried a grand and majestic aura reminiscent of a deity overlooking the world.

So, this is a Celestial Master Teacher... The Byzantium Helios Beast couldn't help but feel deference to Zhang Xuan.

"You must be curious why these puppets and the will that subdued you are Otherworldly Demons..." Oblivious to the other party's thoughts, Zhang Xuan swiftly told it about the matter regarding the Otherworldly Demon puppets and Vicious.

Considering the undying loyalty that the Byzantium Helios Beast held to mankind, there was no need for Zhang Xuan to hide it from him.

"I see..." After hearing the details, the Byzantium Helios Beast couldn't help but feel deeper respect for Zhang Xuan.

Were it not for the young man before it, had the heart been given time to recover and make a comeback, mankind would have been in deep trouble.

By subduing the other party, that was equivalent to averting a disastrous catastrophe for mankind, and that was a huge merit!

If he were to report this contribution to the Master Teacher Pavilion, he would be rewarded with top-tier Saint weapons!

"Since you have submitted to me, I will treat you as one of my own. Here is an inner core of an Ancient Ape. As long as you assimilate it, you should be able to overcome your current bottleneck and reach higher realms!"

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan threw the inner core he had procured from the Ancient Ape on the Cloudmist Ridge over.

Just like the Ancient Ape, the Byzantium Helios Beast was also an ape-type saint beast as well. Due to the similarities in their constitution, it shouldn't be too difficult for the Byzantium Helios Beast to assimilate the inner core to raise its cultivation.

“Thank you, master!”

Holding the inner core in hand and feeling the pulsating energy within it, the Byzantium Helios Beast's eyes reddened in agitation.

Just as Zhang Xuan had deduced, the inner core was indeed extremely useful to it. If it utilized the core well, it could easily reach Saint realm 2-dan.

“There's no one around here, so you can cultivate here without worries!”

Seeing the excited gleam in the other party's eyes, Zhang Xuan left the Byzantium Helios to be and walked out of the formation.

The matter with the Byzantium Helios Beast was finally resolved.

With the backing of the old principal's tamed beast, it was unlikely that there would be anyone who would dare to challenge him in the Master Teacher Academy in the future.

Just as Zhang Xuan was stretching his back lazily, Sun Qiang walked up to him and reported, “Young master, Lady Luo is here. She is waiting in the main hall!”

“She's here?” Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. Without any hesitation, he rushed to the main hall.

Even though he had only met Luo Ruoxin thrice, he couldn't help but feel something special for her. It was an inexplicable sensation, but it was one he had never found in any other lady before.

In terms of beauty, he had met plenty of beautiful lady before. Zhao Ya, Wang Ying, Shen Bi Ru, Zhao Feiwu, Luo Qiqi, Yu

Fei-er, Hu Yaoyao... They were also ravishing beauties with their own unique disposition and charm.

But toward them, he only harbored ordinary feelings between one of a teacher and student or friends, nothing more than that.

He had no idea why this was the case.

But with Luo Ruoxin, just the thought of spending some time with the other party left his heart hastening slightly in anticipation.

Stepping into the main hall, he saw the back of a ravishing white-robed figure standing at the center of the room. The figure was relatively small in contrast to the vast room, but her beautiful silhouette seemed to capture one's attention entirely, rendering it impossible to tear one's eyes away from her.

"Luo shi!" With a smile, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and greeted her.

"Zhang shi!" Luo shi turned around and smiled. In an instant, it was as if a field of flowers had bloomed in the room.

After settling down in the seats in the main hall and exchanging some pleasantries, Luo Ruoxin said, "I came to look for you because I have something I require your help on!"

"Feel free to request anything from me. As long as it's within my means, I will definitely accomplish it!" Zhang Xuan said.

"Zhang shi is truly too polite. However, the matter I am going to request of you is indeed something only you can do because you possess the Eye of Insight... On top of that, if I am not mistaken, you are a Celestial Master Teacher too, right?" Luo Ruoxin said calmly.

"You..." Taken aback, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

He had been doing his best to conceal his identity as a Celestial Master Teacher all along, and not even a 7-star master teacher like Mu shi had been able to see through it. But Luo Ruoxin actually saw through it with a single glance... Was this for real?

So far, the only one who had managed to do so was Vicious.

But Vicious was a figure who had fought with Kong shi on equal grounds in his time!

It should come as no surprise that his eyes would be keener than many others. However, Luo shi should only be a 6-star master teacher. How could she see through it as well?

Noticing Zhang Xuan's shock, Luo Ruoxin smiled. "I noticed it back when we first met in the Verdant Mountain. However, as we weren't really acquainted with one another then, I chose not to point it out."

As she spoke, she couldn't help but recall the other party's silly actions back in the Verdant Mountain, and an urge to chuckle welled up in her.

In the time that she had lived, she had encountered countless geniuses of all sort. However, this was the first time she had encountered one as silly as him.

"I see..." Zhang Xuan scratched his head, not knowing how he should respond.

It wasn't like he had to hide his identity as a Celestial Master Teacher at all cost. All he feared was the news reaching the ears of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

But since the other party had been aware of it but kept silent all along, she should be a trustworthy person.

"May I know what the matter you require my help on is?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Considering the fact that he couldn't see through the other party's cultivation and that the other party was able to tell that he was a Celestial Master Teacher easily, there was no doubt that Luo Ruoxin wasn't an ordinary 6-star master teacher. At the very least, it was highly likely that she possessed strength on par with Mu shi.

For such an expert to require his help, what could the matter be?

"I want you to follow me to the Saint Ascension Platform!" Luo Ruoxin said.

"Saint Ascension Platform?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had never heard of such a place before.

“It is said to be the place where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood back then. I wish to visit there to take a look and verify some deductions of mine,” Luo Ruoxin said with a slight frown.

“The place where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

“Indeed. Legend has it that Kong shi was no ordinary Saint but one recognized by the heavens, thus the usage of the word ‘ascension’. The Saint Ascension Platform isn’t an ancient ruin but a popular tourist location. Each year, countless master teachers would make a pilgrimage there to pay their respects to Kong shi,” said Luo Ruoxin.

“It’s a tourist location? If that’s the case, what am I to do there?” Zhang Xuan asked in astonishment.

Since the Saint Ascension Platform was a tourist location, every nook and cranny of it must have been examined innumerable times by the master teachers visiting it. Even if he were to head there, it was unlikely that he would be able to contribute anything!

“You are a Celestial Master Teacher just like Kong shi. On top of that, you have also comprehended the Eye of Insight. Perhaps, you might be able to see something others can’t,” Luo Ruoxin replied.

“Besides, Kong shi’s handwritten words are inscribed there. It will be beneficial for you to take a look too!”

“This...” Zhang Xuan hesitated. “How far is the Saint Ascension Platform from here?”

“Not too far. If you ride on the Great Violetwing Beast, the journey should take about six to seven days!” Luo Ruoxin said with a chuckle.

831 Zhang Xuan, I Shall Crush You Utterly!

“Six to seven days? That’s not too far...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Despite being a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan spirit beast, the Great Violetwing Beast wouldn’t even be able to reach the borders of Hongyuan Empire in six to seven days. Judging from that, it didn’t seem like the Saint Ascension Platform was too far away.

With a faint smile, Luo Ruoxin asked, “How about it? Are you interested in going with me?”

“Of course!” Zhang Xuan nodded excitedly.

Putting aside that Luo Ruoxin was going as well, it was a good opportunity in itself for any master teacher to visit the grounds where Kong shi had ascended to Sainthood.

On top of that, there was a chance he might learn something about the Innate Fetal Poison there as well.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan asked, “When do we set off?”

“If it is convenient for you, we can set forth this instant...” Luo Ruoxin replied.

“Alright!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Since the Grand Intermittence Grass hadn’t arrived yet, Zhang Xuan couldn’t forge the Grand Intermittence Pill. At the current moment, Wei Ruyan’s soul and body were being nourished by the Ten-leafed Flower and Earth Vein Spirit Essence respectively, so there shouldn’t be any problems in the short run. A six to seven days journey shouldn’t be an issue.

After instructing Sun Qiang to take care of the others, he and Luo Ruoxin leaped onto the back of the Great Violetwing Beast and set forth for the Saint Ascension Platform.

...

Shortly after Zhang Xuan left Hongyuan City, Dong Xin arrived at the office of the head of the Formation Master School, Chen Chengxun.

Noticing the anxiety on the usually composed face of his most prided student, Chen Chengxun asked apprehensively, “What’s wrong?”

Dong Xin clenched her teeth and said, “I have something extremely important to report... I hope that teacher can take me to meet School Head Lu Feng!”

“You want to meet School Head Lu Feng? Whatever for?”
Chen Chengxun frowned.

A matter brought up with the stand-in principal would elevate the issue to the academy-wide level. Just what kind of matter would require such attention?

“This matter concerns the safety of the Master Teacher Academy... as well as Senior Byzantium Helios and the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe!” Dong Xin said grimly.

“Senior Byzantium Helios?”

Chen Chengxun immediately stood up in agitation. “You have news on him?”

“Yes!” Dong Xin nodded.

“That’s good news. Follow me, I’ll take you to School Head Lu...”

Not daring to make light of the matter, Chen Chengxun swiftly took his direct disciple to the Apothecary School.

Before long, they arrived at Lu Feng’s residence.

After sealing the surroundings to ward off any eavesdroppers, the two school heads took their seats and gazed at the young lady before them.

“So, what’s the matter?” Lu Feng asked with a tinge of agitation in his voice.

Mu shi had once said that whoever who found the Byzantium Helios Beast would be the next principal of the academy. If Lu

Feng were to obtain the authority of principal, he would be able to deal with Zhang Xuan as he pleased.

Be it Mo Zhu or Zhao Bingxu, they would only be able to accept the verdict quietly.

“It’s like this. Earlier today... I saw Senior Byzantium Helios!” Dong Xin said.

Lu Feng and Chen Chengxun’s eyes immediately lit up upon hearing those words.

“You saw him? Where is he? Is he safe?” Lu Feng asked anxiously.

Since Dong Xin had seen the Byzantium Helios Beast that day, it meant that the latter was still in Hongyuan City. If so, they could still make it in time to save him if they were to rush over immediately.

“He... is currently in Zhang Xuan’s manor,” Dong Xin said.

“Zhang Xuan’s manor? Why would Senior Byzantium Helios be there?” Lu Feng asked in astonishment

“It’s like this. By some coincidence... I happened to pass by the manor and saw Senior Byzantium Helios being trapped within a formation in the manor. He tried to escape, but he couldn’t break out of the formation...” Without hiding anything, Dong Xin revealed everything she had seen in Zhang Xuan’s manor.

As she had been hidden quite a distance away, she couldn’t get a clear glimpse of the puppets, so she thought that they were real Otherworldly Demons.

“You are saying that... Zhang Xuan ordered twenty Otherworldly Demons to assault Senior Byzantium Helios, and from the looks of the situation then, he seems to be their leader?” Overwhelmed by the news before him, Lu Feng abruptly stood up.

This was really beyond his imagination.

Even for someone who had lived for several centuries, he could hardly believe what he had just heard.

“Is what you said true?” Chen Chengxun asked Dong Xin anxiously.

This was truly a huge matter.

To order twenty Otherworldly Demons to attack the Byzantium Helios Beast, and to emanate a powerful killing intent himself... All of this was clearly screaming that Zhang Xuan was a spy in the Master Teacher Academy, and it was highly likely that he was an Otherworldly Demon himself!

“I am willing to use my identity as a master teacher to vow that every word that I have said is true. If there is the slightest falsehood in my words, I am willing to have my master teacher license revoked...” Dong Xin raised her right hand and swore earnestly.

To swear in one’s name as a master teacher was one of the heaviest vows one could make. If something were to go wrong, even if the Master Teacher Pavilion chose not to pursue the matter, it would still lead to a collapse in faith, making it difficult for one to make any progress in their Soul Depth.

“This...” Seeing Dong Xin make such a vow, Lu Feng and Chen Chengxun exchanged glances, and their expression grew even graver.

A moment later, a thought suddenly struck Lu Feng, and he exclaimed in realization, “That explains why that fellow is skilled in so many supporting occupations despite being only twenty this year, surpassing even school heads like us! So that’s the reason!”

Noticing the confusion of the other two beside him, Lu Feng explained, “The Otherworldly Demons possess a far longer lifespan than us humans. Even though that fellow seems to be in his early twenties, the chances are that he is an old monster who has lived through many eras. Otherwise, how could he possibly achieve such expertise in his smithing, pill forging, medicine, and terpsichorean arts?”

“This...” Chen Chengxun pondered for a brief moment before nodding in agreement. “What you’ve said makes sense. He has

been causing great chaos in the academy ever since his enrollment, rallying the students to join his Xuanxuan Faction and support him. I have been thinking that there is something abnormal about this situation, but if he truly is an Otherworldly Demon, everything makes perfect sense!”

That Zhang Xuan simply had far too many mysteries surrounding him. Even his comprehension of the Eye of Insight seemed insufficient to justify the unbelievable accomplishments he had achieved thus far. However, if he was indeed an Otherworldly Demon, everything came together like pieces in a puzzle.

“Otherworldly Demons are the bane of humanity. As master teachers, we have to kill every single one of them...” A sharp glint flashed across Lu Feng’s eyes, and he gritted his teeth furiously.

The enmity between Otherworldly Demons and humanity was already etched deep into their bones, irreconcilable at this point. Since Zhang Xuan was an Otherworldly Demon, there was only one thing to do... he had to die!

“That’s right. It’s our responsibility as master teachers to eliminate all those who intend humanity harm.” Chen Chengxun spoke in agreement.

However, the next moment, a frown appeared on his forehead. “But Zhang Xuan has already won the trust of School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others. If we can’t find any concrete evidence against him, we might only end up creating a rift among ourselves.”

“Those fools!” Lu Feng harrumphed coldly.

With an air of superiority, he declared confidently, “From the first time I saw him, I could tell that fellow wasn’t a good person, but they just simply wouldn’t believe it. Now, look at what their obstinacy has led us to. Alright, let’s look for Mu Shi and explain this matter to him. Afterward, we shall assemble the Ten Great Master Teachers, bring Zhang Xuan over, and expose him before them!”

“Indeed! With Mu shi around, the others won’t be able to oppose the matter!” Chen Chengxun nodded in agreement.

“Un!” Lu Feng nodded in satisfaction.

After which, he turned to the young lady in the room and said, “You are Dong Xin, right? You have done well. Later, when we meet Mu shi, recount what you have seen to him... I know that apothecary is one of your supporting occupations as well. As long as you settle this matter well, I will take you in as my direct disciple and impart pill forging to you personally!”

Hearing those words, Dong Xin immediately knelt down and greeted agitatedly, “Dong Xin pays respect to Lu laoshi!”

If Lu Feng were to become the principal of the academy, she would be the direct disciple of the principal. With her standing as the direct disciples of two school heads, it would only be a matter of time before her Dong Xin Faction became the number one faction in the academy!

Hahahaha!

Hu Yaoyao, Long Cangyue, and Xue Zhenyang, let’s see how you compare to me then!

As for Zhang Xuan... with his identity as an Otherworldly Demon revealed, his life was over. His name was no longer worth even a mention.

“Alright, let’s look for Mu shi now...”

With a nod, Lu Feng was just about to head out when he abruptly stopped. “Wait a moment! If I recall correctly, Zhang Xuan has a close relationship with Luo shi as well. If we meet Mu shi now, I fear that the news might reach Zhang Xuan somehow, giving him time to make preparations in advance. It will be difficult for us to capture him if he flees!”

Concealing his aura and disguising as a master teacher, it would mean that the other party was likely royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe.

If an expert of that caliber were to flee in advance, not even a Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would necessarily

be able to track him down and capture him, let alone the Master Teacher Academy.

This matter would have to be planned carefully.

“Indeed!” Chen Chengxun also nodded in agreement.

No matter how slim the chances were, it was never wrong to be prepared.

After a moment of contemplation, Lu Feng instructed, “School Head Chen, help me look into where that Zhang Xuan is at the moment. Dispatch a few men to observe him all day long, don’t give him any chance to escape... Once our preparations are ready, we shall inform Mu shi and have him judge the matter!”

As much as he would have loved to rush straight up to Zhang Xuan and have him executed immediately, he knew that this wasn’t the time to be reckless. As a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, he was still able to keep his composure in crucial moments like this.

“I will have it done!” School Head Chen replied before leaving the room. A moment later, he returned after dispatching two elders to Zhang Xuan’s manor.

An hour later, one of the two elders walked into the room and reported, “School Head Lu, School Head Chen, we went to Zhang Xuan’s manor, and he isn’t there. Thus, we asked around, and it seems like he left on an aerial spirit beast with Luo shi earlier this afternoon...”

“He left?” The trio was stunned.

“That’s right. He left two hours ago. As for where he went, he didn’t inform anyone before departing, so we weren’t able to uncover his trail,” the elder replied.

With their cultivation as Saint realm experts, it wasn’t too difficult for them to check the entire manor discreetly to confirm Zhang Xuan’s absence. After which, they questioned those living in the vicinity about Zhang Xuan’s whereabouts, which was where they learned that Zhang Xuan had left with Luo shi on an aerial spirit beast.

However, considering that not even Sun Qiang knew where he was heading, there was no way the others could possibly know.

“He left two hours ago?” Lu Feng’s complexion was extremely awful.

A spirit beast could cover several thousand kilometers in two hours. Even if he were to dispatch the full force of the Master Teacher Academy, there was no way he could locate an aerial spirit beast who could be anywhere within a several-thousand-kilometer radius in a short period of time, and by the time they managed to find any trail, the other party would have been long gone.

Lu Feng turned around and asked, “Are his students still around?”

“They are!” the elder replied. “Also, based on our sources, it seems Luo Shi was the one who extended the invitation to him to head out.”

“That’s good. From the looks of it, it seems he has only headed out to settle some matters. The fact that his students are still around likely means that the news hasn’t reached him yet. Keep a close eye on this matter. When he returns, make sure to report to me as soon as possible!” Flinging his sleeves, Lu Feng instructed them with a majestic disposition fitting that of a principal of the Master Teacher Academy.

“Yes!” The elder nodded before leaving the room.

“Now that he’s not around, what do we do?” Chen Chengxun asked.

“What do we do? We wait! As soon as he returns, we shall conduct an Elder Conference and unmask his true identity before Mu Shi and the others!” With killing intent raging in his eyes, Lu Feng sneered coldly.

Arrogant, aren’t you? Challenging my authority and destroying my Apothecary School...

Zhang Xuan, let me tell you. Your good days have come to an end!

Just wait and see. I, Lu Feng, shall crush you utterly!

832 Saint Ascension Platform

While Lu Feng and the others were organizing their ploy to expose Zhang Xuan's true identity, Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin were seated by the window in the room on the back of the Great Violetwing Beast, watching as the clouds flew by them.

“The Saint Ascension Platform is the place where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood. Upon his ascension, he inscribed his insights personally on a cliff face at the peak of the mountain... On top of that, it's said that he also left a sliver of his will there to gift to a fated man. Since you are a Celestial Master Teacher as well, you might just be able to obtain it!” Luo Ruoxin said with a smile.

“A sliver of Kong shi's will?” Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

As the founder of the Master Teacher Pavilion, even a sliver of Kong shi's will could send countless master teachers fighting frenziedly over it.

“That's right. The will isn't too strong as it was left right after Kong shi reached Saint realm, but nevertheless, considering that it belonged to Kong shi, it is not something to be underestimated... If you were to obtain and assimilate it, it won't be long before you reach Saint realm too!” Luo Ruoxin replied with a nod.

“Saint realm?” A bitter smile emerged on Zhang Xuan's face. “I am only at Perfect Harmonization realm at the moment, still a long distance away from reaching Saint realm.”

Beyond Perfect Harmonization realm was Ethereal Treading realm, Chrysalis realm, Half-Saint, and finally, Nascent Saint!

There were four realms standing between him and Saint realm. Even if he were to gather sufficient cultivation technique manuals to compile the respective Heaven's Path Divine Arts for those realms, the Earth Vein Spirit Essence was still unlikely to be sufficient for him to cultivate that far.

The Heaven's Path Divine Art's demand for spiritual energy increased at an exponential rate. Perhaps, Zhang Xuan might have to expend up to a thousand times more spirit stones or spirit essence just to reach Saint realm.

Furthermore, the thresholds between Chrysalis realm to Half-Saint and Half-Saint to Nascent Saint were known to be extremely difficult to overcome. Many preceding cultivators had their journeys terminated prematurely at those two bottlenecks. Even if Zhang Xuan cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, he wasn't certain that he could overcome them for sure.

“When I first met you at the Verdant Mountain, you were only at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. However, in less than two months, you have already reached Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle. That's a growth of three realms in less than two months! Even I hardly see such swift growth around. Saint realm might still be a distance away, but it shouldn't be a problem for you!” Luo Ruoxin consoled.

When she had first met Zhang Xuan, he had only been at Clarifying Turbidity realm pinnacle. In their second meeting, he had already reached Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle. She had thought that his current rate of growth was already incredible, but when she met him once more the day before, he was already a Perfect Harmonization realm expert.

Such a rate of growth was truly astounding.

“I was just lucky...” Zhang Xuan smiled awkwardly.

Not wanting to dwell further on this topic, Zhang Xuan suddenly thought of something and asked, “Right, do you have any Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique manuals with you? The quality doesn't matter, I just need as many of them as possible!”

The Master Teacher Academy did have a Cultivation Depository to store cultivation technique manuals, but its security was far tighter than the other libraries in the academy. Putting aside the fact that the advanced formation made it hard for even a soul to slip in, the ones guarding the premises were mainly the Saint realm teachers as well. After the prior

experience in the Terpsichorean Compendium Pavilion, he dared not enter it recklessly.

One Wei Ranxue had already nearly him killed. If he were to encounter multiple Saint realm experts specializing in soul attacks, he might just very well lose his life.

As a result, despite visiting the libraries of the various schools, he hadn't paid the Cultivation Depository a visit yet.

It was not that he couldn't find it, but he dared not enter it.

Since it happened that there was nothing to do at the moment, if he could obtain some Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique manuals from the other party, he could study them and raise his cultivation.

“Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique manuals? I only have one of those, and it's a cultivation technique passed down within my clan, so I am unable to share it with you...” Luo Ruoxin shook her head.

“Pardon me, I was being impetuous!” Zhang Xuan apologized.

Based on what he knew, the young lady before him was likely from a Sage Clan, the Luo Clan. Clans like that guarded their heritage tightly, and asking for the other party's cultivation technique abruptly could be considered a disrespectful action.

Take Mu shi for example, he was expelled from his clan due to revealing the secrets of his clan's cultivation technique to an outsider.

“Don't worry about it. However, if you wish to make a breakthrough to the Ethereal Treading realm, I can offer you some pointers instead...” Luo Ruoxin smiled.

“Ethereal Treading, the eighth dan of Transcendent Mortal. By aligning one's body with nature, one can achieve the feat of stepping upon thin air...”

Listening carefully to Luo Ruoxin's words, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

As expected of an expert from a Sage Clan, her understanding of Ethereal Treading realm was extremely detailed, and there were nearly no mistakes to be found!

If Zhang Xuan were to cultivate by the method she had imparted, even without a compiled Heaven's Path Divine Art, he would still be able to achieve a breakthrough.

However, he decided not to rush into it.

Even for a cultivator of the Heaven's Path Divine Art, it was still essential for him to build a strong foundation for his cultivation. Otherwise, even if he could advance his cultivation swiftly, it would be like the moon in the water, dissipating with a light touch.

It had only been two days since he had reached Perfect Harmonization realm, so it was imperative for him to allow his cultivation to settle down first before making another advancement.

Nevertheless, the conversation with Luo Ruoxin benefited him greatly, giving him a deeper insight into the intricacies of cultivation.

It was a three-day journey to the Saint Ascension Platform. Zhang Xuan had been too busy with various miscellaneous matters previously to cultivate, so this was a good opportunity for him to reinforce his cultivation.

Absorbing the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, Zhang Xuan further tempered his Heaven's Path zhenqi, making it even purer and more condensed.

...

Time passed in a flash.

The three days of hard work had allowed Zhang Xuan to fully reinforce his Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle cultivation, resulting in his aura becoming sharper than before.

Even though his strength was still capped at 14,000,000 ding, he had become able to utilize his zhenqi more nimbly, thus furthering his battle prowess.

However, the most conspicuous change was with the spiritual sea in his dantian, having expanded by more than twofold. Pure zhenqi filled the area to the brim, and as if a full dam, one could draw immense power from it in an instant.

At the same time, his understanding of the Perfect Harmonization realm had also deepened. If he wished to, he could achieve a breakthrough to the Ethereal Treading realm whenever he wanted to.

...

I should take a look at the golden book first! Zhang Xuan thought.

After accepting School Head Jiang as his student, a golden book had appeared in his Library of Heaven's Path. Due to the various matters he had needed to address back then, he hadn't had chance to take a good look at it. Since they were still a distance away from the Saint Ascension Platform, this was a good opportunity to examine it.

This book resembled the golden Book of Heaven's Path before the Library of Heaven's Path's upgrade, but its cover was replaced with a deeper tone instead. However, that only seemed to grant it a profound and grand aura.

It seems like with the upgrade of the Library of Heaven's Path, even the Book of Heaven's Path has upgraded too... Zhang Xuan noted.

So far, the golden pages in the Book of Heaven's Path had four main known uses—assimilating the knowledge of the books contained in the Library of Heaven's Path into his mind, serving as a brick to crush one to death—this was effective on even experts of Vicious' caliber as well—raising one's Soul Depth, and sealing an entity within the page.

After the upgrade... would the pages formed within the slightly darker Book of Heaven's Path possess some different abilities?

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to delve deeper into the matter, a gentle voice suddenly interrupted him. "We have arrived at the Saint Ascension Platform!"

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan immediately withdrew his consciousness from the Library of Heaven's Path, and as soon as he opened his eyes, he saw Luo Ruoxin standing by the

window. Her eyes were gazing at the sight outside, forming a peaceful and picturesque scene.

Zhang Xuan walked up to her, and beyond the window, he saw a tall mountain towering in the midst of an empty plain, resembling a majestic dragon rising to the clouds.

However, what was particularly striking was that the mountain had a flat peak, and from afar, it resembled a massive altar. There was a mountainous path coiling around the mountain that led straight to the top.

“So, this is the Saint Ascension Platform?” Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

By the bizarre work of nature, the mountain seemed to resemble an altar connecting the heavens and the earth together. It would be hard to imagine that there could be such a unique naturally-occurring landscape had Zhang Xuan not seen it with his own eyes.

“It’s said that Kong shi sat at the top of the mountain for three days, and at the moment of his breakthrough, the voices of the angels descended from the heavens, and myriad gongs chimed simultaneously in celebration of his accomplishment!”

Seemingly knowing quite a bit regarding the details of Kong shi’s ascension to Sainthood, Luo Ruoxin explained with a smile, “No one knew what the mountain was like before, but it assumed its current form after Kong shi ascended to Sainthood. It resembles an altar allowing those born on earth to come in touch with the heavens, doesn’t it? Cultivating at the peak of the mountain helps to open up one’s mind, which may aid one in achieving a breakthrough. This is also the reason many cultivators choose to make a pilgrimage here in pursuit of overcoming their bottleneck.”

Zhang Xuan nodded.

Through his Eye of Insight, he could see many silhouettes walking along the coiling mountainous path in the distance.

Just as Luo Ruoxin had said, there were many who visited these grounds in hope of seeking enlightenment. However,

whether one succeeded or not would be dependent on their luck.

“As this is the place where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood, the Master Teacher Pavilion has deemed this area as one of its sacred grounds. If one wishes to visit the top, one will have to walk up the mountain a step at a time. All forms of flight are banned, and not even Saint realm experts are excluded from the rule... Let’s land at the foot of the mountain,” Luo Ruoxin said.

Out of respect to Kong shi, pilgrims were disallowed from flying straight to the peak. If one wanted to reach the top, there was only one way, and that was to scale the mountain via the coiling mountainous path!

Thus, Zhang Xuan had the Great Violetwing Beast land at the foot of the mountain.

However, before they could even reach the ground, they could already see countless people donned in master teacher robes slowly walking up the mountainous path.

Most of them were Chrysalis realm experts, but there were also a handful of Half-Saints and Nascent Saints too. Some of them were master teachers, but there were also ordinary cultivators amid the crowd as well. It seemed like they had come here in hope of a miracle too.

“Are these experts all from Hongyuan Empire?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

With just a sweeping gaze, he could easily spot over ten thousand cultivators on the mountainous path, and they were all Chrysalis realm, Half-Saint, and Nascent Saint experts... But when had there been so many experts in Hongyuan Empire?

“Of course not! The Saint Ascension Platform is located near the borders of Hongyuan Empire, at the intersection of over a dozen Tier-1 Empires. Sometimes, even cultivators from the Conferred Empires pay a visit here too. Most likely, of the crowd you see ahead of you, less than one percent is from Hongyuan Empire,” Luo Ruoxin replied.

Zhang Xuan nodded. "I see."

After all the reading he had done over the past few days, he had obtained a rough overview of the distribution of power in the region.

Hongyuan Empire was a Tier-1 Empire beneath Qingyuan Conferred Empire.

In total, there were several dozen Tier-1 Empires like Hongyuan under Qingyuan Conferred Empire. All in all, Qingyuan extended over several ten million kilometers, and its population exceeded a trillion.

Even though Hongyuan Empire was well-reputed in Qingyuan Conferred Empire due to the existence of the Master Teacher Academy, it was still far from being the largest and strongest among the Tier-1 Empires. At most, it could only be considered as slightly above average.

This was also precisely the reason there weren't many experts in Hongyuan Empire.

The strongest expert in Hongyuan City was only at Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle, but in some of the more powerful Tier-1 Empires, there might be Saint 2-dan or even Saint 3-dan experts.

Even among Tier-1 Empires, there could be a significant difference in the fighting prowess of each empire.

"Are there Master Teacher Academies in the other Tier-1 Empires too, or is it only found in Hongyuan Empire?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Establishing a Master Teacher Academy is an extremely expensive project requiring a huge amount of resources. As such, even though Hongyuan Empire isn't the only place with a Master Teacher Academy, there are very few Tier-1 Empires that have them. Of the dozens of Tier-1 Empire under Qingyuan Conferred Empire, there are only four Master Teacher Academies in total," said Luo Ruoxin.

"However, these four academies are located rather far from one another, so not a lot of people are aware of their existence!"

“There are four academies?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

All along, he had thought that Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy was the only one among the Tier-1 Empires. Who would have thought that there were three others as well?

Considering that Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy had a hundred thousand master teachers, it should be around the same for the other academies as well.

It seemed the Master Teacher Continent was truly huge, at least several dozen thousand times larger than the planet he had lived on previously!

Scary!

833 Ancient Secre

Amid chatter, the Great Violetwing Beast eventually arrived at the foot of a mountain and landed. Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin stepped off its back and watched it leave into the distance before following the crowd on the path up the mountain.

With the master teacher emblem pinned on their chests, there wasn't anyone who hindered their path.

After taking a few steps, Luo Ruoxin gestured to her surroundings. "Recorded along this path are the insights and comprehension of cultivation that countless predecessors have left behind after paying the Saint Ascension Platform a visit."

Taking a closer look at the cliff face by the side, there were indeed all kinds of inscriptions on it.

There were two main reasons master teachers would make a pilgrimage there. One was to pay respects to the honorable Kong shi, and the second was to utilize the lingering aura around the Saint Ascension Platform to achieve a breakthrough to Sainthood. Just as there were those who failed, there were also those who succeeded.

Out of sheer delight, those who had succeeded would usually record the insights they had upon breaking through so that future generations could refer to them, and perhaps, take the final step across the threshold as well.

Of course, each insight was only based on the individual's comprehension, so they might not be applicable to everyone. Nevertheless, over the course of many years, countless insights had accumulated on the cliff faces, making them a valuable source of inspiration.

Most of these detailed the methods and the sensations experienced upon achieving breakthroughs to Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, and even Saint realm. Quite a few pilgrims had

stopped in their footsteps to study them carefully, mesmerized by the content.

“There are too many insights here. It will take me at least a month to finish reading all of them...”

In the several dozen millennia since Kong shi’s ascension to Sainthood, countless experts had visited the Saint Ascension Platform, and the writing extended all the way to the various mountains in the vicinity. Even with Zhang Xuan’s photographic memory, it would still take at least a month for him to see all of the insights.

Glancing at the cultivators who were studying the writing intently, Luo Ruoxin shook her head. “Each cultivator has their own unique constitution, cultivation technique, and personality. Due to these differences, what they require to achieve a breakthrough also differed from one another. These insights may seem like a valuable source of inspiration, but if one were to read too many of them, one might lose sight of what is important and descend into confusion instead!”

As useful as the writing might be, it had its flaws as well.

Most of the insights contained the crystallization of the wisdom of the writer, making them a valuable source of knowledge. However, what worked for one might not necessarily work for another.

The more knowledge one accumulated, the more paths would be opened up before one. But at the same time, it also made it more difficult to sieve out the feasible path from all of the options.

Besides, even though there were countless roads a cultivator could take, all of these roads eventually converged into the same peak.

The Master Teacher Pavilion encouraged cultivators to be innovative and take risks. It was through such a culture that innumerable cultivation techniques, battle techniques, and secret arts had been created over the years. There were even more formidable cultivators who had successfully forged their own unique paths based on their own interpretation of the

world, some conflicting with the accepted conventions of cultivation even, but they still managed to create their own feasible system.

Given the astounding complexity and vast number of possibilities within cultivation, there was no cultivator who could possibly make sense of everything. As such, there were many cultivators whose cultivation had gone berserk due to taking in too much miscellaneous information and losing their way.

This was also the reason the Master Teacher Pavilion maintained a tight control over the impartation of cultivation techniques. Only with the permission of a master teacher would a cultivator be allowed to copy the content of a cultivation technique manual. Otherwise, if one were to study indiscriminately, they could very well end up dulling their judgement instead, resulting in confusion.

It was also for the same reason most master teachers were encouraged not to study the writings unless they had been stuck in a bottleneck for too long and couldn't find the impetus to make a breakthrough.

While others might not be able to fully make sense of the writings inscribed into the cliff face, I am different... Zhang Xuan thought.

There were insights from at least several million cultivators inscribed in the area, and perhaps even Kong shi might have fallen into a state of confusion from this bombardment of information. However, Zhang Xuan was different.

With the Library of Heaven's Path, he could easily discern truth from falsehood and rationalize everything easily. Such a problem wouldn't affect him.

But... these writings aren't in the form of books but engravings on the wall. I wonder if I can take them in...

So far, the Library of Heaven's Path had only taken in written information in the form of books. Considering that the writings were inscribed on the cliff instead, it was hard to tell

whether the Library of Heaven's Path could copy them in or not.

"I should give it a try. Flaws!" Zhang Xuan muttered softly with his eyes fixated on the wall.

Hualalala!

The next moment, the Library of Heaven's Path jolted intensely, and countless books fell from the heavens and onto the shelves.

Zhang Xuan took one of the books out and flipped it open. It contained the words which his gaze had been fixated on previously.

It works! Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

It seemed that, with the upgrade of the Library of Heaven's Path, his ability to store information in the Library of Heaven's Path by his gaze wasn't limited to only books but possibly written information of any sort too!

I don't have any use for these at the moment, but once my cultivation reaches the required level, I won't have to go through the trouble of searching for cultivation technique manuals anymore... Zhang Xuan thought in delight as he followed Luo Ruoxin up the mountain.

Along the way, his gaze would sweep across the cliff face to take in the insights on it.

If he had read them normally, it would have taken him a month's time at the very least. However, being able to take in the writings with his gaze, his speed was only limited by how fast he could walk. On top of that, the content would be filtered through the Library of Heaven's Path too, so he need not worry about falling into confusion either.

As the duo advanced, the number of cultivators who lingered by the cliff faces to study the writings reduced, and the number of experts increased.

The bottom of the mountain was mainly filled with Chrysalis realm cultivators, but at their current location, the crowd was predominantly Nascent Saint experts. Because of that, he

became the odd one out instead, being the only Perfect Harmonization realm cultivator there.

As the Saint Ascension Platform was considered a sacred ground for master teachers, there were none who dared cause trouble here. Advancing ahead, it took Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin an entire night before they arrived at the peak. There, they saw something resembling an altar.

On the flat peak towered a massive cliff face, and there were countless cultivators densely packed before it.

Some were master teachers, and some were ordinary cultivators, but one thing common among them was that they were gazing deeply into the words on the cliff face, some pondering, some analyzing, some experimenting, and some cultivating.

The surroundings were extremely quiet, as if no one was willing to disturb the tranquility that lingered in these sacred grounds.

“These are the insights that Kong shi had when he ascended to Sainthood,” Luo Ruoxin informed Zhang Xuan telepathically.

“This was left behind by Kong shi?” Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to the cliff face.

Majestic words describing a person’s insight in his breakthrough from Nascent Saint to Saint realm were inscribed on the cliff face.

With Zhang Xuan’s deep comprehension of painting, he could tell that the words had achieved a profound level. If not for some kind of power suppressing them, they might have gained sentience and escaped from the cliff face, becoming a lifeform themselves.

Upon reaching the peak of painting, one could create a palpable world with one’s brush, leaving others unable to discern it from the real world.

Legend had it that a 9-star painter once drew out a prison that incarcerated an army of millions to their deaths. The army had no lack of Saint realm experts as well, but not a single person had been able to escape from the world he created.

While the painting on the cliff face had yet to reach such a level, it gave the distinct feeling of a lifeform, as if the words would leap out from their positions and slip away any moment.

After looking for a moment, Zhang Xuan replied with a frown, “Wait a moment... these words don’t seem like Kong shi’s!”

While these words carried an imposing disposition to them, they lacked the magnanimity to harness the world within them.

Since it was something left behind by Kong shi, it should carry altruism for the world in it. But the act of these words attempting to escape by themselves was conflicting with that.

“You have seen Kong shi’s words before?” Luo Ruoxin asked.

“Un. A student of mine has Kong shi’s personal letter which contains his handwritten words. The form might be similar, but there’s something quite different about the words on this cliff face and that...” Zhang Xuan replied.

There weren’t too many words on Kong shi’s personal letter, but they carried an inexplicable force that jolted one’s soul. Even Zhang Xuan had gone through Soul Tempering of a Mentor’s Calligraphy due to that, enjoying a significant rise in his Soul Depth.

But the words before him didn’t carry such a quality.

“You’re right. These aren’t the words left behind by Kong shi...”

Luo Ruoxin shook her head. “Even though this is sacred ground for master teachers and has been guarded carefully by the Master Teacher Pavilion, it has still been attacked by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe multiple times, and in one of those attacks, Kong shi’s heritage was wiped off as well. What you see now is an imitation made by one of the masters of the Painter Guild!”

“Kong shi’s words were wiped off by the Otherworldly Demons? But... didn’t the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe disappear from the world?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

So far, he had only met one living Otherworldly Demon so far, but not only was it a hybrid, it was even talked into committing suicide by him.

Vicious and the Otherworldly Demon puppets were remnants left behind by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, but by no means could they be considered truly alive.

Since the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had already disappeared from the Master Teacher Continent, how could they possess the force to destroy such a well-guarded sacred ground?

They had at least met several dozen thousand Half-Saint and Nascent Saint experts on the journey to the peak. The difficulty in scaling the mountain to destroy Kong Shi's heritage was not any different from barging into the Master Teacher Academy to kill Lu Feng.

In a sense, it could be said to be a nearly impossible feat.

“Disappear? If the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe has disappeared from the world, why would the Master Teacher Pavilion still be spread across the world? Why would the Master Teacher Pavilion even go through the trouble of establishing Master Teacher Academies here and there? Why would they hold such strict examinations?” Luo Ruoxin said with complex emotions rippling in her eyes as she shook her head.

“Hongyuan Empire may seem calm, but that's far from the case!”

“Are you saying that... there are Otherworldly Demons in Hongyuan Empire?” Zhang Xuan's face warped in shock.

“Indeed. You must have heard of the disappearance of the Master Teacher Academy's old principal as well. If my conjecture is right, that's probably the doing of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe as well,” Luo Ruoxin said with melancholy.

“The doing of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?” Zhang Xuan expression turned grim.

If the old principal's death was truly the doing of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, that would explain why the Byzantium Helios Beast carried such hatred for him back then.

Hu Yaoyao also said something similar to that... Zhang Xuan tightened his fists.

With the presence of the Master Teacher Academy in the city, he had always thought that Hongyuan City was as secure as it could get. However, it seemed like his thoughts were too naive.

“The Otherworldly Demonic Tribe originated from another world. Back then, in order to invade the Master Teacher Continent, they built many passageways linking their world to here, and Hongyuan City happens to be one of the places where a passageway is located... Otherwise, considering how Hongyuan Empire's national power is only average among the various Tier-1 Empires, how could the Master Teacher Academy be built here?” Luo Ruoxin explained.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

He had never really thought about this matter before, but Luo Ruoxin's words were logical and persuasive.

There were indeed many doubtful aspects regarding the choice of location to establish the Master Teacher Academy. However, if the true aim of the Master Teacher Academy was to maintain the seal on the passageway between the Master Teacher Continent and the other world, everything would make perfect sense.

“The reason I brought you here is not to study the words on this cliff face. While the cliff face once contained Kong shi's handwritten words, what remains is just an imitation. It might be possible to imitate the form, but it is impossible to imitate the intent as well... What I hope for you to do is to use your Eye of Insight to trace Kong shi's aura and find the real location where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood!” Luo Ruoxin said.

“The real location where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood? You are saying that... he didn't ascend to Sainthood on this

peak?”

Since this place was known as the Saint Ascension Platform, it was naturally the place where others thought Kong shi had ascended to Sainthood...

Could it be that this Saint Ascension Platform is a fake?

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Knowing what Zhang Xuan was thinking about, Luo Ruoxin replied with a smile, “Of course not. It’s true that Kong shi ascended to Sainthood here, but it’s not certain exactly where in this huge area he did so.”

“This...” Zhang Xuan blinked his eyes blankly.

The flat peak of the mountain in itself extended for several ten thousand mu. On the other hand, Kong shi would only take up, at most, a square meter by himself during his cultivation. To find a single square meter from an area of several ten thousand mu... That was indeed difficult.

“But is there a purpose to finding the exact location where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

The entire mountain was permeated with the grand aura that Kong shi had left behind from his ascension to Sainthood. Since that was the case, it shouldn’t matter whether they found the precise location where Kong shi had made his breakthrough at.

Besides, even if they were to find it, considering that several dozen millennia had passed, and the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had wreaked havoc here multiple times, what could possibly remain there?

“I just wish to verify a deduction I have... Furthermore, Kong shi’s will still remains here. It will be beneficial to you too if you can find it!” Luo Ruoxin said.

“I will give it a try then...” Hearing the other party’s words, Zhang Xuan eventually nodded.

Activating his Eye of Insight, he began observing the cliff face intently, analyzing every single inch of it.

As expected, those words were just an imitation of Kong shi’s original words. Through the Eye of Insight, he could see a

clear difference in the disposition of the words as compared to those written by Kong shi.

A moment later, he shook his head.

“None of Kong shi’s original words remain... I can’t find anything at all.”

“You can’t find anything?” Luo Ruoxin frowned before sighing deeply.

She had already expected such an outcome. After the many assaults on the Saint Ascension Platform by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, all traces of Kong shi had been pretty much wiped clean. Even the possessor of the Eye of Insight would be unable to trace Kong shi’s trail anymore.

The Eye of Insight might be formidable, but tracking down the remains from several dozen millenniums ago was clearly still beyond it.

“What about the surroundings?”

“It’s the same too... Furthermore, there are too many people here, so I can’t clearly discern anything,” Zhang Xuan replied.

There were countless people who scaled the Saint Ascension Platform each day to cultivate, and there were all kinds of formations and tools activated in the area to facilitate their cultivation. To search for Kong shi’s trail—which would be incredibly faint, if it had not completely dissipated, after such a long period of time—amid this chaos was nigh impossible.

After a moment of contemplation, Luo Ruoxin said, “I see... Since that’s the case, try looking at the content of the words inscribed on the cliff face. Perhaps, you might be able to find a clue in it.”

Since it was impossible to find Kong shi’s trail, they could only work from the inscribed words then.

Even though the current words inscribed on the cliff face had not been inscribed by Kong shi personally, the words did come from Kong shi. Perhaps, there might be some clue contained within them.

“Alright.” Zhang Xuan nodded before turning his gaze over to the cliff face.

Flaws!

Zhang Xuan willed, and in the next instant, a book appeared in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

He picked up the book, and a moment later, a bizarre expression surfaced on his face.

Noticing the anomaly in Zhang Xuan, Luo Ruoxin asked, “What’s wrong?”

“It’s not much, but... it seems like the insight which Kong shi left behind... isn’t that accurate...” Zhang Xuan replied with a frown.

Through the analysis of the Library of Heaven’s Path, it was revealed that there were nine flaws contained regarding the insight Kong shi had left behind.

If it had been anyone else, even if the other party was a 9-star master teacher, Zhang Xuan wouldn’t have been so surprised. But Kong shi... this was a little hard to believe.

Even though these flaws were very minor and inconspicuous ones, making it hard for anyone to notice them, they were still mistakes; this was an undeniable fact.

To think that even the World’s Teacher would make such errors... Was this for real?

Taken aback, Luo Ruoxin asked, “Isn’t that accurate? Do you mean to say that... there are problems with the insights Kong shi left behind?”

“That’s right. There is a total of 3,324 words contained within Kong shi’s insight, and there is a total of nine mistakes in it. Even though these are extremely minor mistakes that won’t affect the overall picture, still...” Zhang Xuan said hesitantly.

On his journey up the Saint Ascension Platform, he had taken in the insights of the predecessors and successfully compiled the Heaven’s Path Divine Art regarding the breakthrough to Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, and Saint realm. Comparing the

compiled Heaven's Path Divine Art with the insight Kong shi had left behind, the errors in the latter were apparent.

Even though what Kong shi had left behind was only an insight and not a cultivation technique, most of the cultivators used it for reference for their cultivation. If it wasn't altered, even if one could successfully achieve a breakthrough by referencing the insight, the effects wouldn't be ideal.

“You are able to see the mistakes Kong shi left behind?” Luo Ruoxin exclaimed softly in astonishment as she gazed at him intently.

Who was Kong shi?

The World's Teacher, the founder of the Master Teacher Pavilion, as well as the man who brought about the eviction of the Otherworldly Demons from the Master Teacher Continent, ushering an era of prosperity for humanity... His contribution to the world was truly immeasurable!

Part of the reason Kong shi had been able to achieve all of those feats was due to his unparalleled talent and unimaginable capabilities. Countless master teachers viewed him as their goal and aspired to be like him, and yet, this fellow had actually said that there were nine flaws in the insight Kong shi had left behind!

If the master teachers in the surroundings were to hear his words, they would surely fly into a frenzy and pummel him into the ground!

Luo Ruoxin's exclamation abruptly brought Zhang Xuan back to reality. He suddenly realized that he might have revealed far too much, so he hurriedly patched things up with an awkward smile. “Ahhh... Actually, I am not too sure either. There might be a mistake in my comprehension too...”

Zhang Xuan harbored no doubt regarding the Library of Heaven's Path's capability. However, he was currently only a Perfect Harmonization realm cultivator, so it was inevitable that others might doubt his credibility when he mentioned that there was a mistake in Empyrean Kong shi's words.

“There is no mistake in your comprehension. There are indeed nine flaws in the insight Kong shi left behind!” Paying no heed to Zhang Xuan’s response, Luo Ruoxin nodded affirmatively.

The next moment, however, a deep frown surfaced on her forehead as she continued, “There are only two possibilities to such a happening. First, this insight was left behind by Kong shi right after he achieved a breakthrough to Saint realm, long before he became the World’s Teacher whom everyone respects. If that’s the case, it wouldn’t be too surprising that he made mistakes.”

Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing that Luo Ruoxin didn’t pursue the matter, and after hearing the words of the latter, he couldn’t help but nod in agreement.

It would be unfair to judge Kong shi based on the Library of Heaven’s Path. Even with Kong shi’s unparalleled talent, it wasn’t too surprising that he might have a few minor mistakes in his comprehension of Saint realm, especially since he had barely reached Saint realm himself.

On the contrary, it was an extremely impressive feat for a person to have a mere nine flaws in his comprehension despite only just having reached Saint realm.

“What about the second possibility?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“The second possibility is that Kong shi left those flaws within the insight deliberately. After all, there was no guarantee that there wouldn’t be men with malicious intent or even those of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe who would attempt to study his insight as well. If so, they would benefit from his teachings as well, and that is no different from delivering a weapon into the hands of the enemies. On top of that, this might be his way of teaching the later generations of master teachers that it is foolish to blindly trust the teachings of others. Even he, the World’s Teacher, could make mistakes, so they must have a mind of their own and discern what is right and wrong for themselves!” Luo Ruoxin said.

“This...” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

Truthfully, he hadn't thought deeply into Kong shi's intentions at all.

However, what Luo Ruoxin had said was logical and could very possibly be true.

It was out of a trust in a teacher's capability that a student would acknowledge the other party as their teacher, but this shouldn't form the basis of blind trust. Only through doubting and questioning established teachings could one surpass one's predecessors and reach greater heights!

Could Kong shi have really intentionally left these nine minor mistakes in order to challenge the mindset of master teachers?

If one could doubt even Kong shi himself, one might just be able to achieve what no one else ever had.

On the other hand, if one were to blindly trust Kong shi's teachings, even if one were to achieve a breakthrough to Saint realm, one would soon find one's own accomplishments swiftly being capped by a bottleneck.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan said, "If it is the first possibility, Kong shi should have returned to alter the flaws he left after he established the Master Teacher Pavilion... The fact that he didn't do so means that it is highly likely that it was the second possibility!"

"Indeed." Luo Ruoxin nodded in approval.

If it was a mistake out of ignorance, as the World's Teacher, Kong shi would have surely been ashamed of his failure, thus compelling him to return and correct it. But since he hadn't done so, the odds seemed to lean more toward the second possibility then.

But whether there were flaws in the insight or not had little to do with the exact location of where Kong shi had ascended to Sainthood, so there wasn't much point in analyzing the matter any further.

I should first study the content of the insight first. If this fails, I will just have to look around slowly...

With such thoughts in mind, Zhang Xuan immersed his consciousness into comprehending the writing Kong shi had left behind.

The insight described the process of how Kong shi achieved his breakthrough to Saint realm. Even though it wasn't explicitly written as a cultivation technique, it was so comprehensive that if one were to jot down the details, it could form a complete cultivation technique.

But of course, this cultivation technique was specific only to Kong shi's constitution. If others were to attempt a breakthrough via that cultivation technique, what would await them was only their own cultivation going berserk.

This was somewhat similar to what the Heaven's Path Divine Art was to Zhang Xuan. If others attempted to cultivate the Heaven's Path Divine Art, they would first find themselves bleeding profusely from their seven apertures before they could accomplish anything.

After studying for some time, Zhang Xuan was unable to find anything reminiscent of a hint from the writing, so he could only give up on it. Standing up, he activated his Eye of Insight and began combing the area.

The peak was extremely spacious. Other than the area before the cliff face, which was completely packed with cultivators, there was still plenty of room to move about.

It didn't take too long for Zhang Xuan to circle around the area, but he was still unable to find anything. Disappointed, he shook his head helplessly.

He hadn't expected it to be so difficult.

But thinking about it, if it was that easy, the Otherworldly Demons would have long found the location and obtained the will that Kong shi had left behind.

With his efforts futile, Zhang Xuan was just about to regroup with Luo Ruoxin when a commotion suddenly broke out in front of the cliff face, breaking the tranquility at the peak. There was a large group of people discussing with one another, seemingly sharing their own insights and comprehensions.

Zhang Xuan couldn't help but grab a middle-aged man not too far away and ask, "Excuse me, may I ask what is going on?"

The middle-aged man glanced at Zhang Xuan and replied, "You must be new here! Every day, the Saint Ascension Circle conducts lectures to decipher the essence of Kong shi's teachings. This is an opportunity for everyone to learn and have their doubts answered."

"Saint Ascension Circle?" Zhang Xuan had never heard of such an organization before.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's surprise, the middle-aged man shook his head and said, "The Saint Ascension Circle is a group that specializes in studying and deciphering the writing Kong shi left behind here. It consists of thirteen 7-star master teachers and several hundred 6-star master teachers. They aim to uncover the underlying intentions that Kong shi had when he inscribed his insight onto this cliff face through their research.

"Over the years, they have already gained a deep understanding of the subject. Outsiders like us might find it hard to comprehend the thoughts of Kong shi even if we were to stare at the cliff face for an entire month straight, but through their lectures, we can understand the thoughts that the latter had in mind when he was making his breakthrough to Saint realm."

"To think that there would be such an organization here..." Zhang Xuan was speechless.

As complicated as it may sound, the circle was actually rather similar to those organizations involved in the study of Redology, Goldenology, and the other classics in his previous life—a bunch of fellows who had nothing better to do with their lives!

If it wasn't out of boredom, why would they bother scrutinizing every single word written, losing themselves in needless profundities?

Similarly, Kong shi had just left his insight on the cliff face in his moment of delight after successfully reaching Saint realm. What more was there to uncover from that?

To think that so many master teachers would devote so many years of their lives to researching something as insignificant as this...

Just the thought of it rendered him speechless.

The next moment, the middle-aged man exclaimed, "Look, they are here..."

Following which, three elders could be seen walking to the front of the crowd. Seven apertures refer to the eyes (2), nose (2), ears (2), mouth (1). Redology refers to the field which studies the Dream of the Red Chamber, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of China. Goldenology (not a real term) refers to The Plum in the Golden Vase, a famous work passed down from the Ming Dynasty.

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Dressed in master teacher robes, the three elders had snowy hair and beards, and they emanated powerful auras.

“7-star master teachers...”

Glancing at the brilliant emblems pinned at their chests, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

These elders were actually 7-star master teachers! This meant that their strength had already surpassed even the strongest expert in Hongyuan Empire.

“I have kept all of you waiting...” one of the elders said with a smile upon reaching the front.

His voice wasn’t loud, but it resounded clearly within the ears of the listeners. In an instant, the commotion died down.

“It’s only right for us to wait for elders!”

“It’s my honor to listen to elders’ lecture!”

The crowd below clasped their fists in response.

Most of those who stood before the cliff face were Half-Saint and Nascent Saint experts, which translated to 6-star low-tier and 6-star high-tier master teachers. This meant in terms of standing, they paled far in comparison to three elders in front. Under such circumstances where they didn’t know the names of those before them, it was only right for them to address the other party as elders.

“We are all fellow cultivators, so there is no need to stand on ceremony. Allow me to introduce myself first. I am Wu Ran, and I have been managing most of the affairs of the Saint Ascension Circle in recent years. I am a master teacher from Qingzhu Empire, and you can call me Wu shi!” the elder said as he stroked his beard.

“Wu Ran? Could you be the incumbent leader of the Saint Ascension Circle?”

“You’ve heard of him?”

“Of course! Wu shi not only possesses a deep comprehension of Kong shi’s Insight to Saint Ascension, he is also the principal of Qingzhu Academy?”

“Qingzhu Academy? You mean... the Master Teacher Academy located at Qingzhu Tier-1 Empire?”

“That’s right! Qingzhu is one of the four empires out of the 46 Tier-1 Empires under Qingyuan Conferred Empire to have a Master Teacher Academy... While Qingzhu Master Teacher Academy is only ranked third of the four, above only Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, nevertheless, the fact that he could become its principal reflects the immense capability and profound knowledge that he possesses!”

“Seriously? It’s truly a huge honor to listen to the lecture of such an incredible person!”

...

Shock rippled through the crowd when they heard Wu Ran’s name.

While the Saint Ascension Circle would conduct lectures there on a daily basis, most of the time, it was conducted by ordinary members. Thus, many of the cultivators of the peak were surprised to see the leader of the circle, a 7-star master teacher and the principal of a Master Teacher Academy, conducting the lecture himself.

It was truly a huge honor to have the other party decipher Kong shi’s teachings for them personally.

“To my left is Wang Liao, Wang shi, and Sun Jing, Sun shi. If you have any doubts, feel free to direct them to us. We will try to answer them to the best of our ability!” Wu shi said with a smile.

“Wang Liao? I’ve heard of that name before! He once wrote a paper, Kong shi’s Path to Enlightenment, which made a huge uproar in the neighboring Tier-1 Empires. It’s said that the paper brought enlightenment to over three hundred cultivators, thus allowing them to overcome their bottlenecks. He is one of the Ten Great Master Teachers of Qingzhu Empire!”

“I have heard of Sun Jing as well. He is one of the Ten Great Master Teachers of Qingzhu Empire, too. The book that he wrote, Nascent Saint Breakthrough Formula, is one of the most sought-after manuals in the region. I had to pay a huge number of high-tier spirit stones to purchase it... To think that I would meet the author in person here!”

Hearing the names Wu shi introduced, a huge wave of commotion broke out once again.

The two elders behind him weren't nameless figures either; on the contrary, they enjoyed widespread fame.

Just that... considering that Qingzhu Empire was extremely far from there, such that it would take half a month's journey even on a saint beast, why would those esteemed men suddenly travel to the Saint Ascension Platform?

“Since it seems like everyone knows of us, I will just get straight down to business. I will start from lecturing everyone about the origin of Kong shi's insight!”

After introducing himself, Wu shi surveyed the surroundings with a meaningful gaze before beginning his lecture.

“As everyone knows, the era which Kong shi lived in was the period of time when the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe held the dominant position in the continent. Back then, mankind lived every single day in fear, not knowing when they might be killed. Living in such tumultuous times, even though Kong shi became a Celestial Saint, an existence recognized by the heavens, he still worried for mankind and contributed to its welfare... As such, if you were to ruminate over the insight closely, even though it carries a tinge of joy from his advancement to Saint realm, at the same time, complex emotions coming from his worry for mankind and the world can be felt from it as well!”

Worry for mankind and the world? Zhang Xuan widened his eyes, unable to believe what he had just heard.

Kong shi had left behind this insight just to remind the later generations to always rely on their own judgement, and to

never fully trust the wisdom of their predecessors. How in the world did the other party sense such deep emotions from it?

Your imagination sure is vivid!

But giving the matter some thought, that was indeed the job of academics such as them. They strove to uncover the deeper intentions behind the words of the predecessors so that others could better appreciate them. However, they had a tendency to go too far and overthink even the most minor of details so as to flaunt their knowledge, such that if the author were to come alive once more and see their evaluation of his work, he would also be completely flabbergasted!

And from the looks of it, it seemed Wu shi was such an academic as well!

“... Try reading this writing once more with such emotions, and you will be able to comprehend Kong shi’s state of mind then!” Wu shi continued.

“Just like this sentence, ‘Stale rice and cold water, a bent arm as a pillow, but joy lies not in those but in itself.’ This is a reflection of the agony mankind suffered under the oppression of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. It can be interpreted that despite the suffering Kong shi endured, he felt utmost joy from working for the welfare of mankind...”

After listening for a while longer, Zhang Xuan’s eyelids began twitching uncontrollably.

It was not that the other party was exactly wrong, but they had elevated Kong shi to a height beyond reach in their hearts, to the point where they viewed him with rose-colored goggles, failing to see the man himself. This would only lead their interpretation further and further away from the truth.

However, the other party couldn’t be entirely blamed for this either. Kong shi was simply far too much of a venerated figure among the master teachers, and his infallibility had become a deeply-ingrained notion in the minds of many. As such, there was a tendency to evaluate everything that he had left behind in a higher and nobler perspective, and anything other than

that would be viewed as challenging Kong shi's authority and disrespecting one's teacher.

However, Zhang Xuan was different. As the saying goes, 'the onlooker gets the clearest glimpse of the situation'. Having come from a different world, he didn't possess as deep of an impression of Kong shi as most in this world, who had been taught to admire and respect Kong shi from a young age.

On top of that, as one who possessed the Library of Heaven's Path, he had learned never to place blind faith in the words of others too.

Hong long!

But in that moment, a Nascent Saint cultivator standing just slightly in front of him seemed to have a sudden surge of inspiration, and with a jolt through his body, he abruptly achieved a breakthrough.

That sight left Zhang Xuan completely stunned.

He had just been thinking that the lecture was completely nonsense and would surely be ineffective a moment ago when someone really achieved a breakthrough.

A thought suddenly emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind.

Could this be... faith?

Perhaps, even Wu shi himself might have been aware that his interpretation had deviated from Kong shi's original intention, but he still chose to shape his lecture in such a manner in order to play on the deep respect that master teachers had for Kong shi. Through empowering this faith, it could strengthen one's resolution, turning it into a driving force for one to achieve a breakthrough.

The difference between a Saint and a Nascent Saint lay not only in their cultivation but their state of mind as well!

This explained why despite the far-fetched theories that the Saint Ascension Circle proposed, it still enjoyed widespread popularity among the populace.

Stroking his beard in satisfaction, Wu shi continued, "Not bad, someone has already achieved a breakthrough... Moving on, I

believe one of the lines that might have many of you stumped is this, ‘Composure frees worries, and agitation induces disturbance. If one can devote oneself to the calm, a breakthrough is possible even in the state of stagnancy...’ Its meaning is simple. As long as one maintains a composed state of mind, even without sufficient zhenqi, one can still achieve a breakthrough.”

“This...” Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but burst into a soft chuckle.

This happened to be one of the nine flaws reflected in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

Maintaining a composed state of mind was indeed important, but one still had to possess sufficient zhenqi to achieve a breakthrough. There was a limit to what sheer willpower could do.

Nevertheless, it was indeed true that a calm mind could give rise to a state of accomplishment through inaction, inducing the growth of one’s zhenqi and ultimately allowing for a breakthrough.

While there was a flaw in the sentence, it was probably Kong shi’s way of telling the later generations that they shouldn’t be overly obsessed with their zhenqi cultivation. Tempering the mind was also of utmost importance. Yet, the other party managed to shape it into a secret art to achieving a breakthrough somehow...

It was no wonder no one had noticed the nine flaws and corrected them over all these years.

It wasn’t that the master teachers were too foolish, but they had placed Kong shi on far too high a pedestal, and this had led to the twisting of the intentions behind his words.

“The friend over there, may I ask if there is anything wrong with my explanation for you to have burst into a chuckle?”

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan was about to walk away when he suddenly heard those words.

Raising his gaze, he saw Wu shi staring at him with a deep frown.

While everyone else was listening to the interpretation of Kong shi's insight intently, that fellow was chuckling silently in the corner. This was extremely disrespectful to both him and Kong shi.

As a 7-star master teacher, he could overlook the insult that the young man was showing to him, but he couldn't sit idly when someone was clearly scorning Kong shi's teachings, especially in sacred grounds like this.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan also didn't expect his gesture to be noticed by the other party. Embarrassed, he clasped his fist and bowed. "Hearing your lecture, I suddenly had an epiphany which resulted in my light chuckle. I ask for your understanding if I have been disrespectful!"

Even if the other party was wrong, it had nothing much to do with him. Knowing that it would only cause a huge uproar if he were to stand up at this moment, he decided to apologize and end the matter there.

"Epiphany? Hahaha, can a Perfect Harmonization realm lad like you understand the content of Wu shi's lecture?"

"Kong shi's insight is directed toward Nascent Saint realm experts. Epiphany my head, do you even understand a single word of it?"

"Since you had an epiphany, why don't you achieve a breakthrough for us all to see?"

...

Hearing Zhang Xuan's words, the crowd in the area burst into laughter.

As Nascent Saint realm experts, they didn't dare claim that they understood Kong shi's wisdom. Yet, a Perfect Harmonization realm expert like him had claimed that he'd had an epiphany... How conceited!

How could a person have such thick skin?

Wu shi also frowned upon hearing those words. "Oh? If you've had an epiphany, may I invite you to share it with us? This is a good opportunity for us to learn from one another!"

“This... I shall not embarrass myself up there...” Zhang Xuan hurriedly waved his hands to turn down the offer humbly.

“Are you trying to say that I am embarrassing myself here?”
Wu shi’s face darkened.

“That’s not what I meant though...”

Not expecting the other party to misinterpret his words, Zhang Xuan was stunned. He hurriedly explained, “What I am saying is that with my shallow level of comprehension, my epiphany will only be laughed at, so it isn’t worth a mention...”

“If you are saying that the epiphany you had after listening to my lecture will only be laughed at, does that mean that my lecture is hilarious and not worth a mention too?” Wu shi harrumphed.

“You are misunderstanding my words. I am saying that my comprehension of the subject is still shallow, so...” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“If you can have an epiphany despite your shallow comprehension of the subject and chuckle at it, does that mean that the content of my lecture is shallow as well?” Wu shi snapped.

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“If you really wish to understand that in such a manner, there is nothing that I can do...”

Seeing that the other party was picking flaws with everything that he said, Zhang Xuan frowned. “We are all master teachers, and you have made your point. Since I have already admitted my mistake, surely you don’t have to corner me like that!”

“Audacious!”

“How dare you speak to Wu shi like that?”

“Where did this arrogant brat come from?”

Hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, a huge disturbance broke out amid the crowd.

Having listened to Wu shi’s lecture, the group gathered in the area could be considered to be half-students of his. It was one thing that a Perfect Harmonization realm brat was refusing to listen to the preaching of their half-teacher humbly, but to utter such disrespectful words on top of that... Was he tired of living?

“I am only asking you to share your epiphany here, how am I cornering you here? Humph! To feign knowledge in the face of ignorance, is this the attitude befitting of a master teacher?” With a steely glint in his eyes, Wu shi took a step toward Zhang Xuan.

Hong long!

The immense pressure from the overwhelming might of a Saint 2-dan abruptly fell upon the surroundings as if a tsunami had crashed down upon the area, rendering those caught within it unable to breathe properly.

As one who had dedicated a significant portion of his life to studying the quintessence of Kong shi's insights, Wu shi carried special feelings for the Saint Ascension Platform. As such, he couldn't bear to see another disrespecting it.

But from the moment he began his lecture, that fellow had been putting on all kinds of peculiar expressions, even sneering at one point. It was then that his tolerance snapped.

To act so frivolously in the grounds where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood... If the other party was his student, he would have surely expelled him from his academy that very instant!

That was also why he had lowered himself to bickering with a 4-star master teacher despite being a 7-star master teacher himself. It wasn't out of pettiness but to send out a clear message that any form of disrespect toward Kong shi was intolerable!

Otherwise, if everyone started to act in such a manner, what would become of the Master Teacher Pavilion's dignity?

Feign knowledge in the face of ignorance? Driving his Heaven's Path zhenqi, the pressure weighing down on Zhang Xuan dissipated. Lifting his gaze, Zhang Xuan stared at Wu shi directly in the latter's eye and shook his head.

I only couldn't be bothered to point out your errors, but you managed to pin so many sins on me.

But as stifled as Zhang Xuan was within, he didn't feel like starting anything at this very moment, especially since he was here with Luo Ruoxin. Thus, he clasped his fist and said, "Yes, I apologize for my ignorance and breach of etiquette, and I hope to seek your understanding!"

In any case, he knew better than anyone whether he was ignorant or not. It was pointless to argue with another over this; it was not like he could help what the other party thought of him anyway.

However, if the other party wished to make an example out of him, he should know better than to push his luck further than this.

“To be spouting such arrogant words despite your ignorance, you sure are an embarrassment to master teachers!”

Harrumphing coldly, Wu shi placed his hands behind his back, and with the majestic disposition of a 7-star master teacher, he declared, “I do not wish for someone as presumptuous as you to remain on this Saint Ascension Platform. Take off your master teacher robe and leave the premises!”

“Take off my master teacher robe and leave the premises?”
Zhang Xuan’s face immediately darkened.

To be asked to strip one’s master teacher robe and scam from the mountain was a huge humiliation.

If word of this matter were to spread, his path as a master teacher could very well come to an end at this point.

He had already given so many concessions, but the other party simply continued to try to corner him. Did the other party think that he was an easy target to bully just because he was young?

Even if you wish to send out a stern warning to others, you have already made your point. This is going beyond the limits!

Could it be that I have an extremely loathsome face and anyone who meets me just has to provoke me and teach me a lesson?

“That’s right!” Wu shi glanced at Zhang Xuan coldly.

“Reluctant? Don’t make me do it personally; it won’t end as simply as that if I have to get involved...”

Noticing the hostility in Wu shi eyes, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to Wu shi, revealing his narrowed eyes. “I have already given you so many concessions, but you just want to stick your face in here, don’t you? Your lecture is utter nonsense, filled with flaws everywhere, and it is only out of respect for you as a fellow master teacher that I chose not to expose you publicly. Yet, you started going after me instead!”

He had already gone as far as to apologize, but the other party still refused to step down.

Why? Will you only be contented after you slap my face?

Fine, here is my face... Slap it if you can!

“What did you say?” Not expecting a Perfect Harmonization realm cultivator to speak to him so insolently, Wu shi’s expression turned livid.

Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up as he uttered coldly, “Don’t you have ears to hear what I am saying? Kong shi left his insight as both a warning and advice to the later generations; it is one thing to distort the meaning of Kong shi’s words, but to even go around spreading false teachings and beguiling others, you should be thankful that I didn’t rip apart your lies. To be putting on an act before me here, are you trying to act as if you are formidable?”

He had been intending to keep a low profile and say nothing much, but the other party simply refused to stop.

Just because I am sparing your face, do you think that I am some kind of idiot?

Not expecting the other party to speak so rudely to him, Wu shi nearly burst into rage. “Audacious!”

“Audacious? Who is the one being audacious here? Kong shi left his insight here in order to test the later generations. There is a total of nine flaws here, but despite the many years your Saint Ascension Circle has dedicated to uncovering its secrets, you have never noticed them. What have you been doing all these years? As the incumbent leader of the circle, don’t you feel the slightest guilt or embarrassment?” Zhang Xuan spoke sharply without any reservations.

Since the other party had decided to corner him like that, it would be impolite of him not to return the favor.

“Nine flaws?”

“How could Kong shi make any mistakes? This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard!”

“Stop talking nonsense over there!”

...

Those words had left not only Wu shi stunned, but it had sparked a huge wave of criticism from the surrounding

cultivators as well.

To them, the infallible Kong shi making a mistake was no different from the sky falling on them. How could they possibly believe it?

“You don’t believe my words? Fine, I will point out the nine flaws right here and now for everyone to hear!”

Since he couldn’t be bothered to waste any more time bickering over this matter, Zhang Xuan stepped forward to the cliff face and pointed with his finger. A surge of zhenqi gushed out from his fingertip as if a ray of light, highlighting the area where the first flaw was located. “The first flaw lies in this line, ‘Composure frees worries, and agitation induces disturbance. If one can devote himself to the calm, a breakthrough is possible even in the state of stagnancy...’ What this line is truly saying is that one’s strength and spirit must be in harmony in order to attain true power. Strength without spirit makes one no different from a beast, a being with nothing but brute strength. Without a unique encounter, it would be impossible for one to achieve a breakthrough. On the other hand, spirit without strength is nothing more than a pipe dream...

“Kong shi only left behind a portion of the full quote in order to provoke deeper thoughts in the later generation and comprehend that just having spirit alone or strength alone is futile... Yet, Wu shi claimed that as long as one can achieve a composed state of mind, one can achieve a breakthrough even without strength... Impressive, why don’t you achieve a breakthrough to show all of us? What are you waiting for? Go on!”

“You...” Wu shi’s face flushed scarlet in embarrassment.

“The second flaw lies in the phrase, ‘Fear the world, peer into the unknown horizon, embrace worries and fear, and only then will you advance...’ What this means is that it is imperative to feel fear because that will become the drive for strength. If one remains complacent or escapes from one’s fears, one will only stagnate.

“There is no problem with this line for those who have just started treading on the path of cultivation. But upon reaching Saint realm, one will be wrestling with the heavens for power. If one were to allow fear to remain in one’s heart, how could one possibly win against the heavens?”

“A true expert must be capable of overcoming anything in their path. Fear should only be the basis to building up fearlessness, and only with a fearless mindset can one charge bravely ahead and overcome all odds in one’s path!”

“The third flaw...”

“The fourth flaw...”

...

Zhang Xuan’s words were sharp like knives, cutting straight into the flaws of the insights. They might be minor flaws, but it left the listeners in a daze, and they couldn’t help but tremble in astonishment.

It was not that they had never had their doubts regarding certain aspects of the writing, but as this was the insight left behind by the venerated Kong shi, they disregarded such thoughts and blamed it on their ignorance instead.

But in this instant, for everything to be laid bare so clearly before them, their faces couldn’t help but pale, and a tempest raged within their hearts... Could Kong shi really have been mistaken?

But... that’s Kong shi! How could he be wrong?

He was the World’s Teacher...

At that instant, Wu shi was completely dumbstruck as well.

As a 7-star master teacher, he had the judgement to tell that there were no mistakes in what the other party had said. However, as one who had immersed himself in the study of the insight for many years, those words were a huge blow to him, collapsing the faith which he had held firmly all those years.

“... and this is the ninth flaw!”

In a single breath, Zhang Xuan revealed all nine flaws.

Even though the entire area was ghastly silent, not a single person dared to utter a word or breathe loudly; nearly everyone had already been convinced by his words.

Weng!

As soon as Zhang Xuan's words came to a halt, a blinding light suddenly burst into the surroundings. The next moment, nine words from the nine flaws abruptly tore out from the cliff face and morphed into nine massive words.

“Well said. Blindly trusting another, why not trust yourself!”

At the same time, the words in the nine flaws began rearranging themselves, and in just a short moment, they were corrected, and the writing became perfected.

“This is... Kong shi's acknowledgement?”

“He received Kong shi's acknowledgement?”

“It's not that Kong shi was mistaken, but that... this is a test he left behind for the later generations!”

“It's a pity that we never saw through it. Even the Saint Ascension Circle was unable to do so over all of those years...”

...

How could the crowd still not comprehend what was going on after all that had happened? Their bodies stiffened, and they couldn't help but kneel to the ground.

Since even Kong shi had given his acknowledgement, it could only mean that the words of the young man were correct!

Wu shi's ridicule and their mockery had instantly become nothing more than a joke.

“Th-this... Has all the time I spent studying Kong shi's writing been futile?” In this moment, Wu shi's face paled, and he couldn't help but stagger backward weakly.

The complexion of the two elders beside him, Wang shi and Sun shi, also paled, and they could hardly accept what was happening before them.

It couldn't be more apparent to them that it was a test Kong shi had set for them, but they had gone centuries without noticing it, and they had even taken pride in their analysis...

With many years of debates among many master teachers, the members of the Saint Ascension Circle had thought that they were only a step away from fully comprehending Kong shi's intent. But in this instant, it suddenly dawned on them that...

All of those profound theories they had come up with were nothing more than utter gibberish!

Kacha!

With the appearance of those nine words, an incomparably powerful aura suddenly spread over the crowd, jolting their souls. In an instant, they lost control of themselves and entered a unique state of mind.

Following which, the cliff face behind began shaking violently. As if it had finally fulfilled its *raison d'être*, cracks began appearing on it.

The cracks swiftly crept across the entire cliff face, shrouding its entirety before everything abruptly collapsed with a deafening 'boom!'. Smithereens flew all over the place, and a huge cloud of dust rose in the air.

In just a few short moments, the 3,324 words Kong shi had left behind had disappeared from existence.

The heck...

Watching as all of that unfolded before him, Zhang Xuan felt as if he was going to burst into tears.

He'd known that there were mistakes with the insight, but he hadn't thought that the cliff face would be so fragile as to collapse just by having them pointed out...

You fell valiantly and magnificently with a bang... but what about me?

With all of the master teachers gathered here to witness how I 'murdered' you, they will definitely have me pay with my life...

Must you really do me in like that?

“Hmm?”

On the other hand, Luo Ruoxin was busy searching around for the exact location where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood when she abruptly heard the deafening rumble. Astonished, her body trembled in astonishment as she hurriedly turned her gaze to the cliff face.

There, she saw the dazed Zhang Xuan, whose mouth was twitching non-stop before the cliff face.

Both her eyes and mouth slowly widened in shock.

I was only gone for a moment!

Y-y-you... What did you do this time?

This is the Saint Ascension Platform, you know! How can you destroy this as well?

837 Folded Space

The very heart of the Saint Ascension Platform lay in the insight inscribed into the cliff face at the very top.

As this was something that Kong shi had left behind, there was no master teacher who didn't view it as a sacred relic. None dared to speak loudly before it for fear of desecrating it.

Yet, you actually reduced it to smithereens shortly after your arrival. In its current state, even restoration is no longer a feasible option...

It is one thing for you to mess around in the academy. After all, in consideration of its own reputation, the academy will try to suppress the matters that happen within its grounds.

But this...

Do you have a deep-seated grudge against all infrastructures, or were you simply born with the innate potential to become the God of Destruction?

Does the word 'careful' not exist in your dictionary?

To dare destroy even the sacred lands where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood... Can't you at least pick a less prominent target than that? You are slapping the entire Master Teacher Pavilion in its face!

Without a doubt, you can't even dream of leaving the mountain anymore. Any moment now, countless master teachers will be pouncing on you, grinding you into meat paste.

Speechless, Luo Ruoxin hurriedly rushed up to Zhang Xuan, grabbed his sleeve, and pulled him away to flee.

She was the one who had taken Zhang Xuan there, so she felt that she had to take responsibility for him.

No matter what, it couldn't be wrong for them to flee at that very instant. Otherwise, once everyone came to, they would be goners!

“Hmm?”

Luo Ruoxin had thought that Zhang Xuan, knowing that he was in deep trouble, would flee with the lightest tug, but to her surprise, the latter was completely motionless. It was as if he was rooted to the spot.

“Hurry up and leave!” Luo Ruoxin exclaimed anxiously.

“Just wait a moment!” Zhang Xuan grabbed Luo Ruoxin’s sleeve and halted her instead. With his other hand, he pointed to the rubble and said, “Take a look at this.”

“Take a look at what?” Hearing that Zhang Xuan was still in the mood to look at the rubble, Luo Ruoxin frowned.

However, what she saw next left her eyelids twitching uncontrollably.

What was within the rubble wasn’t just dust or debris but a meter square stone platform with a peculiar light halo circling above it as well. A holy and majestic aura flowed from it, reminiscent of an object from the heavens.

“Could this be... the place where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood?” Luo Ruoxin’s body trembled in agitation.

That was the main reason she was there. After going around the peak and finding nothing at all, she had thought that perhaps it had already disappeared along with the ages, never to be found again. Who could have known that it would be hidden in the cliff face instead!

That explained why the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had been unable to find anything despite ransacking the place.

Back then, what they had destroyed was only the words on the wall, but the cliff face had survived their rampage.

In the midst of her shock, Luo Ruoxin felt someone tugging at her sleeves.

“Let’s head over there to take a look!” Zhang Xuan said as he pulled her to the stone platform.

Without any hesitation, Luo Ruoxin swiftly followed behind him.

The light halo was barely visible amid the cloak of dust drifting in the area. Walking up to it, Zhang Xuan's hand stretched for it and touched it lightly.

Hu!

The light halo immediately expanded, enveloping their bodies. The next instant, Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin suddenly felt an intense falling sensation as the world flew past them, disappearing in a flash.

When the brilliant flash of light finally dissipated, Zhang Xuan, Luo Ruoxin, and the stone platform disappeared from sight, as if they had never been there in the first place.

...

“So that is indeed the truth behind the insight! I never would have thought that my years of research were actually in vain...”

It was only after the disappearance of the duo that Wu Shi and the others finally began to move once more, as if having just recovered from their shock.

After the appearance of the nine words from Kong Shi's acknowledgement, they had been sent into a momentary trance. It was only a short while after that they finally returned to reality.

Recalling the mystical sight they had just seen, their faces flushed scarlet in agitation.

Wasn't the goal of the Saint Ascension Circle to uncover the real meaning behind Kong Shi's words?

Even though the one who had done it was just a Perfect Harmonization realm lad, it was a fact that they had finally uncovered what they had sought for innumerable years!

“Where is the esteemed elder who deciphered Kong Shi's insight?”

The crowd hurriedly turned to the location where Zhang Xuan had been standing a moment ago, but the ground was completely empty. There was not a person to be seen.

At the same time, their address had also turned from ‘brat’ to ‘elder’ as a form of respect.

“He isn’t here anymore. He was standing right there just a moment ago...” Wang shi muttered in astonishment.

In their perception, barely a second had passed since the appearance of the nine words from Kong shi, but that was only a false impression they had due to the momentary trance. They bore no recollection of Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin stepping into the cloud of dust and disappearing in a flash of light, as though everything that had just occurred was a dream.

“To be able to decipher Kong shi’s intentions and earn his acknowledgement, that young man is anything but simple... It’s a pity that we know nothing about him!” Wu shi shook his head in embarrassment.

Just a moment ago, he had been accusing the other party of feigning knowledge in the face of ignorance. However, it couldn’t be clearer to him at this moment that the other party was far more knowledgeable than him.

He felt like a clown prancing around a true expert to flaunt his half-baked knowledge. His actions were truly embarrassing.

Nevertheless, a 7-star master teacher should have the magnanimity worthy of one. He had indeed wronged the other party, and if given a chance to meet that elder once more, he would surely apologize to the other party sincerely.

“Wu shi, the cliff face has collapsed...” Sun shi remarked in worry.

Each year, countless cultivators would visit the Saint Ascension Platform in hopes of achieving a breakthrough. For such a thing to happen, how were they supposed to explain this to the Master Teacher Pavilion?

“The Saint Ascension Platform is a valuable asset, but the writing on the wall was not Kong shi’s personal writing but an imitation. Besides, even though it has collapsed, we have perfected the insight instead. Thus, not only is there no loss to the Master Teacher Pavilion, it’s also a huge merit! I will contact the Painter Guild right now and have them send

someone to conduct restoration works. This time, we shall inscribe the correct version onto it!” Wu shi said with glowing eyes.

Kong shi’s words had already reflected his acknowledgement and acceptance of this matter. Since even Kong shi wasn’t angry, who were they to be furious in his stead?

Not to mention, with the perfected insight, they would surely be able to attract more people to the Saint Ascension Platform, thus furthering Kong shi’s teachings!

“Wang shi, help me calm everyone down here. Sun shi, follow me to comb the surroundings to see if we can find the young man. If we could have him lecture here on Kong shi’s writing, we will surely benefit greatly from his teachings!” Wu shi said.

“Alright!” Sun shi and Wang shi nodded.

After making arrangements, Wu shi and Sun shi hurriedly headed down the mountain to pursue the young man. With their nimble footsteps, it didn’t take long for them to reach the bottom of the mountain. Yet, it was as if the young man had just vanished from the face of the world.

That young man might have caused the collapse of the cliff face, but he had correctly interpreted Kong shi’s intentions and won his acknowledgement. Despite being 7-star master teachers, they were only glad that they could see such a grand sight with their own eyes.

“It’s such a pity...”

Unable to find the young man, the duo sighed deeply in lamentation.

...

After disappearing from the spot, Zhang Xuan and Luo Ruoxin suddenly found themselves standing in a completely different place from where they had been previously.

Before them was a lush field of grass and flowers. Not too far away, there was a simple straw cottage.

“Where... is this?” Zhang Xuan was dazed by this abrupt change in surroundings.

It was just a moment ago that he had been standing at the peak of a mountain, but in the blink of an eye, he had suddenly appeared in a field.

Recalling that he was still grabbing the other party's sleeves, he quickly turned around, only to see Luo Ruoxin's reddened face as she hurriedly tugged her sleeves out of his grip.

A moment later, after she had recovered from the embarrassment, Luo Ruoxin took a look at the surroundings and said, “If I am not mistaken, this should be... a folded space!”

“Folded space?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“Un. A folded space refers to a region where space is pressed together to create vast lands in a very small area. Storage rings are a use of folded space, too. However, the conditions in storage rings are too extreme to contain humans whereas folded space such as this can,” Luo Ruoxin replied.

Zhang Xuan nodded. “Sounds like the Myriad Anthive Nest...”

“That's right, it is fundamentally similar to the Myriad Anthive Nest, but folded spaces are typically much larger.”

Luo Ruoxin nodded. “It isn't too difficult to determine whether the place you are in is a folded space or not. As folded spaces are usually artificial and less stable, the space within it shakes easily with sufficient force.”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan took a deep breath and abruptly punched forward.

Hong long long!

An immense shock wave burst into the surroundings, and the surrounding space seemed to shake slightly.

“It does seem to be rather unstable,” Zhang Xuan remarked.

This verified that the area they were in was indeed a folded space.

However, to be able to compress such a huge space into just a small area, this capability was far more powerful than that possessed by the Anthive Myriad Queen. Just how fearsome must the one who constructed it be?

Having guessed Zhang Xuan's thoughts, Luo Ruoxin said, "Unless one possesses some kind of exceptional means, only 9-star master teachers are capable of utilizing this ability!"

"9-star master teachers?" Zhang Xuan was astonished.

That was an existence that stood at the very top of the continent. Even with the Library of Heaven's Path, Zhang Xuan wouldn't dare to speak loudly before such an existence.

There was simply too huge a disparity between their standing and strength that not even his disguise could make up for.

"Could this have been left behind by Kong shi?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Just by touching a light halo hidden within the cliff face on the Saint Ascension Platform, he had been transported here. As such, it was likely that this was Kong shi's design.

By exposing the flaws publicly, Zhang Xuan might have triggered some kind of mechanism that Kong shi had left behind on the cliff face.

"That's very possible, but... it's still too early to say for sure. Let's head to the straw cottage to take a look first. Perhaps, we might find something conclusive there!" Luo Ruoxin said.

"Alright!" Zhang Xuan replied.

The straw cottage looked rather shabby, similar to that which he had seen on Leiyuan Peak. The door was unlocked, and pushing on it lightly, 'jiya!', the duo entered the cottage.

The room was around twenty to thirty square meters large. There was a square table at the center of the room, and an ancient scroll was placed on it.

Zhang Xuan exchanged glances with Luo Ruoxin before reaching for the scroll and opening it gently.

Words were written on the scroll, and the content was identical with what was inscribed on the cliff face outside.

These words weren't as fanciful as those outside, but as simple and inelegant as they were, they seemed to strike a chord deep within one's heart.

"This is... Kong shi's handwriting!" Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed.

The next instant, his blood flow hastened as if triggered by something, and he subconsciously began releasing the authoritative aura of a Celestial Master Teacher.

Soon, he fell into a trance.

"Soul Tempering of a Mentor's Calligraphy?" Luo Ruoxin frowned.

Without a doubt, what was left on the scroll was definitely Kong shi's personal writing.

Only the World's Teacher had the capability to draw one into a unique state of mind just by his words alone.

Once triggered, the Soul Tempering of a Mentor's Calligraphy tempered one's state of mind, raising one's Soul Depth. It was an encounter that happened only by chance and was desired by all master teachers.

Knowing that she mustn't interrupt Zhang Xuan at this crucial moment, Luo Ruoxin left him to be. She took a swift look around the cottage, but other than the scroll, there was nothing else to be found. Shaking her head slowly, she left the cottage.

She took a walk around the fields surrounding the cottage, and the frown on her face slowly deepened. It was impossible to tell what she was thinking, but the slightly expectant gleam in her eyes seemed to have dimmed in disappointment.

838 Meeting Kong shi Once More

Hu!

After the passing of an unknown amount of time, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief, and a sharp glint flashed through his eyes.

My Soul Depth has grown by 2.0!

With the Soul Tempering of a Mentor's Calligraphy that he had just undergone, his Soul Depth had increased from 19.1 to 21.1.

One of the prerequisites to taking the 7-star master teacher examination was to possess a Soul Depth of 21. In other words, in terms of Soul Depth, Zhang Xuan was currently on par with a 7-star master teacher!

For a 4-star master teacher to possess the Soul Depth comparable to a 7-star master teacher, this revelation could surely leave many shocked to death!

The hardest aspect that had many master teachers stuck was not their cultivation or their supporting occupations but their Soul Depth.

For it to have grown by 2.0 with just a single trip, he had not spent the previous few days in vain.

All of a sudden, just as Zhang Xuan was about to put away the scroll, a bright light suddenly flashed from it, and a scholarly young man dressed in a white robe suddenly appeared in the room.

It was only an illusory figure formed of light, but the features of the young man were extremely distinct, just like a real person.

“To be able to avoid the pitfall of respect and find the flaws in my insight, you did well!”

The young man seemed to be in his early twenties. With a slight smile, he gazed at Zhang Xuan in commendation.

Taken aback, Zhang Xuan widened his eyes. “You are... Kong shi?”

The figure before him might be young, but he did bear a striking resemblance to the old man he had seen during his first acknowledgement of Celestial Master Teacher in Tianwu Kingdom.

Most likely, the other party was Kong shi in his youth!

It was recorded in the books that Kong shi had managed to become a 9-star master teacher before reaching his thirties. They were at the Saint Ascension Platform, which was where Kong shi had made a breakthrough to Sainthood. The corresponding master teacher rank to his cultivation realm then would be 6-star, so making a rough estimation, the other party’s age should indeed be around his early twenties too...

“My surname is indeed Kong...”

The young Kong shi chuckled. “I am nothing more than a sliver of will now, so I won’t be able to maintain my state for too long. Since you were able to find the flaws in my insight and interpret my true intentions, it can only mean that our fate has intersected. The scroll in your hand contains the cultivation technique I used when achieving a breakthrough to Sainthood. Study it well, perhaps it might be useful for your future cultivation.”

“It contains your cultivation technique?” Zhang Xuan took a glance at the scroll.

The content of the scroll was identical to what was inscribed on the cliff face, the only difference being that the scroll contained the personal handwriting of Kong shi and harnessed his grand aura.

Back outside, when Zhang Xuan had taken in the words on the cliff face via the Library of Heaven’s Path, he hadn’t seen a cultivation technique in it...

Had he not been sufficiently thorough in his study of it?

It seemed he would have to look through it carefully when he had time.

“Also, these words harness my essence, breath, and spirit after I ascended to Sainthood. Use it well, it will benefit you greatly.”

The young Kong shi said with a smile, “I will just end it here. After all, cultivation is an individual journey. Work hard, perhaps fate might bring us together once more in the future!”

After saying his piece, the illusory figure began to waver, seemingly ready to dissipate at any moment.

Seeing that Kong shi was about to disappear, how could Zhang Xuan possibly waste any time? Pushing the matter regarding the book to the back of his mind, he quickly asked anxiously, “Wait a moment! I still have a question to ask. From an ancient record, I learned that you were plagued with the Innate Fetal Poison in your earlier years. May I know how you cured it?”

He knew that Kong shi had also suffered from the Innate Fetal Poison from the ancient records, and this was a rare chance to ask the other party about the matter. He wasn’t going to let this opportunity go so easily.

“You are also afflicted with the Innate Fetal Poison?” Hearing those words, the young Kong shi was taken aback.

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan quickly replied. “How can I solve the issue?”

“Hahaha, I am not alone in my path!”

But instead of answering, the young Kong shi’s eyes gleamed in excitement as he laughed heartily. “Finally, another person just like me. Good...”

Hu!

In the midst of his words, the young Kong shi vanished, and his voice gradually faded in the room.

A sliver of will left several dozen millenniums ago couldn’t possibly maintain its existence for too long. It was already a blessing that it had lasted as long as it did.

You... Zhang Xuan was overwhelmed with frenzy.

You haven't answered my question yet...

Is that fellow really Kong shi?

Don't they say that Kong shi had a heart that embraced the world, shouldering the responsibility for the welfare of the world on his shoulders, a good man through and through?

But why was he so creepy instead?

Hearing that I am afflicted with the Innate Fetal Poison, it is one thing for him to not tell me the cure, but to get excited at that as well... What you are not alone in your path, and that I am like you... Are you that glad to see another person as unfortunate as you?

More importantly, good? Good your head!

Zhang Xuan's face was streaked with black lines.

He had been thinking that it was a good opportunity to uncover the cure for the Innate Fetal Poison through the sliver of will Kong shi had left behind. But who knew that... not only did he not receive anything substantial, he ended up being laughed at instead.

Forget it. The Kong shi at this age probably hadn't found a solution yet either... Feeling extremely stifled inside, Zhang Xuan consoled himself.

Considering that the sliver of will had been left behind right after Kong shi ascended to Sainthood, he could only be a 6-star master teacher at best. Since he hadn't even cured his own Innate Fetal Poison then, it wasn't surprising that he didn't have a solution to it yet.

To find the cure, Zhang Xuan would have to find a 9-star master teacher Kong shi.

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan tossed aside those frustrating thoughts and studied the scroll in his hand instead.

The scroll was made of bamboo pieces weaved together. Despite being several dozen millenniums old, there wasn't the slightest wear and tear to it.

Studying the words written on it closely, Zhang Xuan realized that it wasn't written using ink but inscribed using a unique method, which made the words look more wholesome and dignified.

If I study this calligraphy carefully and master it, I will be able to further my accomplishments in painting! Zhang Xuan thought excitedly as he felt the pulsating power infused within the words.

As the first master teacher, Kong shi had been skilled in many occupations, and painting was one of them. Even though he was only a 6-star master teacher when he left those words, his comprehension of painting was already on par with 7-star or perhaps even 8-star painters.

If Zhang Xuan could examine and learn his calligraphy, it shouldn't be too difficult for him to advance his painting skills to 6-star or 7-star.

As for the cultivation technique that Kong shi had spoken of earlier, Zhang Xuan was still unable to find anything about it at the moment. It seemed like he could only decipher it bit by bit to uncover the secret hidden within.

Knowing that Luo Ruoxin was waiting for him, Zhang Xuan was just about to place the scroll in his storage ring when he suddenly felt something. Looking around him and verifying that Luo Ruoxin was nowhere near, he took out a book from his robes.

It was the Book of Heaven's Path that had Vicious sealed within.

Previously, out of fear that he would be lynched for destroying the cliff face on the Saint Ascension Platform, Zhang Xuan had taken the book out from his storage ring in preparation for whatever would come at him.

Zhang Xuan flipped open the book and asked the heart, "What's wrong?"

This fellow had been beating wildly, seemingly intent on saying something.

“That is Kong shi’s personal handwriting, his will is harnessed within it... Why don’t you give it to me? With it, I should be able to recover a fair bit of my strength and be of more help to you!” Vicious said greedily.

“Don’t even think about it!”

Without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan flicked his finger at the heart in the book.

That was Kong shi’s handwriting, an invaluable treasure! How could he possibly give it to Vicious?

“You have already memorized his writing, so the scroll shouldn’t mean anything... With it, I will be able to convert my killing intent into a purer and more orthodox form... In fact, I should be able to imitate Kong shi’s aura as well and teach others a lesson in your stead!”

Under Zhang Xuan’s flick, Vicious spun around several times before eventually crashing to a stop. Unwilling to give up on such a precious opportunity to regain his strength, he hurriedly continued as soon as he recovered. “In any case, I am suppressed by this book of yours, so you don’t have to worry about me escaping your control. So, the more strength I recover, the safer you will be...”

“Don’t even dream about taking this scroll! I will try to think of another way for you to recover your strength!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands before putting away both the scroll and the book decisively.

It wasn’t easy for him to receive Kong shi’s personal handwriting, so he couldn’t allow that fellow to consume it. Besides, he had only obtained this due to Luo Ruoxin’s help, so this artifact belonged not just to him but her as well.

He would have to discuss with her to decide on how they would deal with the scroll.

However, there was one thing that Vicious was right about. The stronger Vicious became, the safer he would be.

Zhang Xuan had faith in the prowess of the Book of Heaven’s Path, so he didn’t need to worry about Vicious revolting against him. After all, no matter how powerful an existence

was, could he possibly rise above the heavens? No matter what happened, Vicious would just have to listen to his words obediently.

Forget it, I will think of a plan later on... Knowing that it was futile to think about all of that now, Zhang Xuan shook his head and walked out of the straw cottage.

The next moment, he saw the silhouette of a young lady standing in the field not too far away. For some reason, her figure looked forlorn.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's presence, the young lady turned around and asked with a smile, "How was it?"

"I benefitted greatly from it... What about you? Did you get what you came here for?" Zhang Xuan asked in return.

The other party had said that she had gone there to confirm her deductions. They had managed to find the exact location where Kong shi ascended to Sainthood, but as for whether she did succeed or not...

"I did find some stuff, but... Forget it, let's not talk about it!"

Reluctant to speak any further, Luo Ruoxin shook her head and said, "It's good that you managed to undergo a Soul Tempering of a Mentor's Calligraphy. This trip hasn't been a waste for you. Alright, I think we should get going now!"

"Yes, we should..." Zhang Xuan nodded slightly before he suddenly recalled the scroll and took it out from his storage ring. "Since we found this together, you are also a partial owner of it. How do you intend to deal with this?"

Luo Ruoxin smiled. "You were the one who found this folded space, so naturally, it should go to you."

Having thought over the matter after entering the folded space, she had realized that it probably hadn't been Zhang Xuan's intention to destroy the cliff face. Instead, it was more likely that he had solved some kind of test that Kong shi had left behind which resulted in the triggering of some kind of mechanism.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “This won’t do. We found this together, so how can I take it for myself...”

If it wasn’t for Luo Ruoxin bringing him here, he wouldn’t have even known that the Saint Ascension Platform existed, let alone come here.

At the very least, he had managed to undergo a Soul Tempering of a Mentor’s Calligraphy from this trip, but the other party hadn’t gained anything. This left him feeling too guilty to take the scroll for himself.

Seeing Zhang Xuan’s response, Luo Ruoxin chuckled softly. “There is no one in this world who doesn’t desire to obtain Kong shi’s personal handwriting, but here you are, trying to give it away to me...”

This wasn’t some grass by the street but Kong shi’s personal handwriting!

Even the Sage Clans would fight one another just to obtain it, and yet, that fellow seemed to think nothing of it at all... It was hard to tell whether he was truly a fool or not.

“Alright, the scroll is of no use to me. If I really want it, I have the means to find more of those. Rest assured and keep it,” Luo Ruoxin said.

“No use to you?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Even though he had no idea why such an invaluable artifact would be useless to Luo Ruoxin, her earnest attitude didn’t seem like she was simply reassuring him for the sake of it.

I am not too sure about the details regarding Sage Clans, but perhaps... they have no lack of Kong shi’s handwriting! Zhang Xuan came to a realization.

Considering that the other party was likely from a Sage Clan, the Luo Clan, and that such clans had millenniums of history, it wouldn’t be too surprising if they had Kong shi’s personal handwriting in their treasure vaults.

Besides, this writing had been left behind when Kong shi had just ascended to Sainthood, long before he had reached his

peak. Perhaps it didn't hold that much allure to offspring of large clans like that.

“I won't stand on ceremony then...”

Seeing that Luo Ruoxin truly didn't want it, Zhang Xuan returned the scroll to his storage ring. Following which, he assessed the surroundings, and with a perplexed look, he asked, “How do we get out of a folded space?”

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“Folded spaces are similar to formations. As long as one finds the door, one will be able to leave it easily,” Luo Ruoxin said.

“Door?” Zhang Xuan looked around his surroundings.

The area he was in wasn't too big, spanning only around several hundred meters. Anything beyond that seemed to be blocked off by some spatial barrier; no matter how he tried to pass it, he simply couldn't step past the boundary.

“It seems the exit should be somewhere in here then...”

Since it was impossible for him to pass the spatial barrier, the exit had to be somewhere within the area he could move in.

Activating his Eye of Insight, he began observing his surroundings intently. Initially, he couldn't find anything, but a thought suddenly came to mind and he turned to the area where he had arrived, and after a moment of keen observation, he finally found a clue.

He walked over to the area, and with a light step, a stone platform identical to the one he'd seen when entering this folded space gradually surfaced.

“That must be the exit. We should be able to leave by stepping on it.” Luo Ruoxin smiled as she took the lead and stepped on the stone platform. With a slight flash, her figure disappeared from the spot.

“Wait a moment...”

Not expecting the other party to leave without the slightest hesitation, Zhang Xuan's heart skipped a beat.

Given that the Saint Ascension Platform had just been destroyed, the master teachers outside would surely be armed with their pitchforks, hunting down the culprit behind the mess. If he were to leave, wouldn't he be pummeled to death?

But since Luo Ruoxin had already left, he couldn't possibly leave her in the lurch. Deciding to just face whatever came his way, Zhang Xuan stepped on the stone platform as well.

Hu!

With a brilliant flash of light, the scenery changed. Blue sky and white clouds, accompanied with a light breeze, appeared before him, and a young lady stood not too far away from him.

"Hmm?" Zhang Xuan took a look at his foreign surroundings and was taken aback. "Where are we?"

From where he stood, he couldn't see the Saint Ascension Platform anywhere. It didn't seem like they were in the area anymore.

"I am not too sure either. My guess is that Kong shi knew that the destruction of the Saint Ascension Platform would cause a great deal of trouble to the one who solved his test, so he set the exit somewhere else," Luo Ruoxin said contemplatively.

"I see, that's a relief..." Seeing that he was spared from the miserable fate of being lynched, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

At this point, he had already realized that as one who had received Kong shi's acknowledgement, the other master teachers wouldn't do anything to him even if he was the culprit behind the destruction of the Saint Ascension Platform. The true problem lay in the existence of the folded space hidden in the cliff face and Kong shi's personal handwriting. If others were to learn that he carried such a treasure in his possession, others could potentially come after him out of greed.

Master teachers were respected for their righteousness and morals, but it was nigh impossible for an organization as big as the Master Teacher Pavilion to accurately assess the character of each of its members. Without a doubt, there would be a few who would succumb to their greed and go after him.

He didn't want to be assaulted day after day over a darned scroll.

After checking the surroundings once more and confirming that he was a safe distance away from the Saint Ascension Platform, Zhang Xuan's tense heart finally calmed down. He called for the Great Violetwing Beast to return to Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and while waiting, a thought suddenly popped into his mind.

Flicking his wrist, a nest around the size of a football appeared in his palm.

The Myriad Anthive Queen emerged from the nest. "Master!" "There is a folded space here. Are you able to put it into your nest?" Zhang Xuan asked.

The Myriad Anthive Nest's interior was only around three meters from one end to the other, and it had been completely packed with just a single Byzantium Helios Beast inside. For a very long time, Zhang Xuan had been looking for some way to expand the space inside the hive.

What was before him at this very moment was a folded space of several ten thousand square meters. If there was some way to assimilate both of the spatial artifacts together, he would really be able to call forth an army of spirit beasts at a whim to decimate anyone who irked him.

The Myriad Anthive Queen took a look at the stone platform and climbed on it for a moment before returning to Zhang Xuan with an excited gleam in its eyes. "Master, I think I will be able to assimilate the folded space into the nest. However... the process will take some time!"

"How long?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Anything concerning space was filled with intricacies, and the Myriad Anthive Queen was only a Perfect Harmonization realm spirit beast. Despite possessing an inborn talent for spatial manipulation, it still wasn't an easy feat for it to conduct an assimilation.

"I will require a minimum of three days to devour it completely, and several months to assimilate it into the nest," replied the Myriad Anthive Queen.

"Alright, I will give you three days then," Zhang Xuan said.

He could still afford to spare three days.

“Yes!” Having earned its master’s permission, the Myriad Anthive Queen hurriedly stepped onto the stone platform and disappeared.

On the other hand, seeing that he wouldn’t even let the folded space Kong shi had left behind go, Luo Ruoxin shook her head.

Other master teachers would be worshipping anything that Kong shi had left behind as sacred relics, not daring to desecrate it in the least. But this fellow... he actually intended on having his own tamed beast devour the folded space where Kong shi had ascended to Sainthood... Really, just what was in his mind?

...

After waiting patiently for three days, the duo finally saw the Myriad Anthive Queen climb out of the folded space with a pale face. Its head had doubled in size, and there was an uncomfortable bulge in its stomach.

After having it return into its nest to expand the space in it, Zhang Xuan, along with Luo Ruoxin, leaped onto the back of the Great Violetwing Beast before returning to the Master Teacher Academy.

This trip to the Saint Ascension Platform had been worthwhile.

Through the Soul Tempering of a Mentor’s Calligraphy, his Soul Depth had reached 21.1, comparable to a 7-star master teacher. He had also obtained Kong shi’s personal handwriting, and even though he had no idea what use it served, it must have some invaluable use to it considering how countless master teachers would fight over it. Last but not least, he had also found a way to expand the Myriad Anthive Nest.

Having devoured such a large folded space, the Myriad Anthive Nest would surely expand to many times its original size once the Myriad Anthive Queen successfully assimilated the folded space in it. By then, he would be able to house the

Byzantium Helios Beast, Great Violetwing Beast, his clone, and even his students in it. He wouldn't have to worry about bringing them around into inconvenient places anymore.

Days flew by like the passing wind for a cultivator. Before long, three days had passed, and Hongyuan City came into sight.

In this time, the Myriad Anthive Nest had grown to be around a dozen meters wide, allowing even the massive Great Violetwing Beast to enter without a problem.

Zhang Xuan hadn't been slacking off either. With the rise in his Soul Depth, his analytical capability had been enhanced, granting him a deeper insight to his cultivation technique, thus allowing him to cultivate faster than before.

He had been intending to suppress his cultivation until he found the corresponding Heaven's Path Divine Art before making the breakthrough, but who could have known that in his sleep on the first day, he would subconsciously make the breakthrough to Ethereal Treading realm primary stage. That had left him feeling incredibly stifled within for the entire day.

He had already resolved to refine his zhenqi well and build up a truly solid foundation for the further advancement of his cultivation, but... it seemed like fate simply wouldn't allow it.

Sigh! It sure is a huge problem when one achieves breakthroughs too easily!

In any case, the breakthrough to Ethereal Treading realm had raised Zhang Xuan's fighting prowess a significant amount. The strength he could tap into from his zhenqi cultivation increased from 14,000,000 ding to 17,000,000 ding!

That was might on par with Ethereal Treading realm intermediate stage experts!

Factoring in the 11,000,000 ding from his soul cultivation and 8,000,000 ding from his physical body, he harnessed a combined strength of 36,000,000 ding, which was more than sufficient for him to destroy even a Chrysalis realm pinnacle expert in a single punch!

(Chrysalis realm pinnacle experts wield a strength of 34,000,000 ding)

Not too long after entering Hongyuan City, the Master Teacher Academy came into view. After arriving at the destination, Luo Ruoxin bade farewell and left, stepping on thin air.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan had the Great Violetwing Beast fly back to his manor.

...

As soon as the Great Violetwing Beast entered Hongyuan City, one of the elders of the Apothecary School hurriedly rushed to Lu Feng's residence and reported to him.

“School head, Zhang Xuan and Luo Shi are back!”

Slapping the table, Lu Feng stood up abruptly with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“He has returned? Good!”

He had thought that the fellow would return in a day or two, but who could have known that he would end up waiting for nearly ten days? Unforgivable!

“Continue keeping tabs on him. Remember, don't let him get away by hook or by crook!” Lu Feng instructed the elder before turning to the side. “School Head Chen and Dong Xin, let's head to the Elder Hall.”

“Alright!” Chen Chengxun and Dong Xin heaved a sigh of relief as they stood up.

In order to ensure that the news didn't leak, they had been asked to remain there for the past ten days as well. Since Zhang Xuan had returned, their 'isolation' was finally over.

Not too long later, they arrived at a tightly sealed room located at the highest point of the Master Teacher Academy.

The Elder Hall!

This was where the Ten Great Master Teachers, principal, and vice principals discussed important matters concerning the academy.

Rarely were there any matters requiring all of the top brass of the Master Teacher Academy to gather together, so the doors of the Elder Hall were rarely opened. However, in just than half a month since the start of the semester that year, it had already opened twice.

The first was regarding the disappearance of Senior Byzantium Helios and the second was on a motion to expel Zhang Xuan.

Entering the room, they activated the formation inscribed in the room to ensure confidentiality before taking a seat and waiting. One by one, the remaining eight school heads stepped into the room as well.

“School Head Lu, what have you assembled all of us so anxiously for this time?” School Head Mo asked as soon as he stepped into the room.

“Indeed. If you are still hung up on the matter regarding Zhang Xuan, I will have to ask you not to waste our time. Even though most of the students of the Apothecary School have withdrawn from their lessons, I have personally made a trip to take a look at the situation after the previous conference, and over half of them have achieved a breakthrough in their pill forging proficiency... In other words, not only should Zhang shi not be punished, our academy should even reward him for his contribution!” Zhao Bingxu said.

After that day, most of the school heads had conducted a private investigation of the matter concerning the Apothecary School out of worry. Just as Lu Feng had said, most of the students of the Apothecary School had withdrawn from their lessons... But despite that, it seemed like they had found a better teacher to further their studies. There was a significant rise in the overall pill forging proficiency of those ex-students.

The vision of the academy was to groom generations of talents for mankind. Anyone, be it teacher or student, who could achieve this would be a meritorious member of the academy. Even if Zhang Xuan’s matter was reported to the headquarters, there was no one who would fault him for his deeds.

Lu Feng waved his hands and spoke leisurely. “Don’t be hasty, I will start once Mu shi and Pavilion Master Mo arrive!”

He might have suffered a checkmate at their hands the previous time, but he had come with concrete evidence in his hands this time around.

Let us see how you can help Zhang Xuan this time!

“Pavilion Master Mo? Why did you call him here?” Wei Ranxue questioned.

The other elders also frowned in displeasure.

While the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and Hongyuan Master Teacher Pavilion were associated with one another, they were considered two different entities, and they rarely interfered in the matters of the other. The Elder Conference should have been something private to the academy, but Lu Feng, of his own accord, had decided to invite Pavilion Master Mo over.

Don’t you find it embarrassing to involve outsiders in our affairs?

Are you inviting the Master Teacher Pavilion to have a good laugh at our own internal problems?

“You will know soon enough!” Lu Feng spoke confidently with his head tilted upward.

All of you who protected Zhang Xuan the previous time around will learn what is truly embarrassing when you learn that he is an Otherworldly Demon!

Seeing that Lu Feng was unwilling to reveal anything further, Zhao Bingxu, Mo Zhu, and the others traded doubtful glances.

Jiya! Jiya!

Not too long later, Mu shi and Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan arrived as well.

“Mu shi, Pavilion Master Mo!” The school heads stood up and clasped their fists.

After everyone settled down, Mu shi asked with a wave of his hand, “What is it this time?”

“Mu shi, this matter concerns both Senior Byzantium Helios and the safety of mankind, so we have to take all possible precautions to ensure that nothing we speak of here leaks out. Thus, before I begin, I beseech you to place an additional layer of protection around this room to prevent anyone from sending news out!” Lu Feng stood up and bowed.

“You want me to place an additional layer of protection?” Mu shi frowned deeply.

Zhao Bingxu’s face darkened, and he bellowed furiously, “Lu Feng, what do you mean by that? Are you suggesting that we will leak the news?”

The other school heads also narrowed their eyes in displeasure.

They were the only ones in the room; Lu Feng was clearly guarding against them.

On top of that, he even clearly said that he wanted to ‘prevent anyone from sending news out’. They were the Ten Great Master Teachers, the school heads of the Master Teacher Academy! Did Lu Feng think that they would leak news regarding something as important as the safety of Senior Byzantium Helios and mankind to others?

That was a clear attack on their integrity and honor!

Lu Feng’s gaze swept across the room as he spoke sharply.

“Well, I do know that I won’t leak any news to outsiders, but I can’t say the same for the others. This matter has huge implications, and there are a few among us who have been beguiled by that scoundrel. I am only doing this as a precaution!”

840 Zhang Xuan Is My Teacher!

The hot-tempered Wei Ranxue's face darkened, and she bellowed furiously, "Beguiled? Who are you talking about? I will have to ask you to stop beating around the bush and get straight to the point!"

School Head Mo harrumphed coldly. "She's right! We, the Ten Great Master Teachers, have known each other for at least several centuries now, but for you to say such words... Are you suggesting that I will reveal important secrets to outsiders? Or are you accusing School Head Zhao or School Head Wei? Or perhaps, you think that you are the only trustworthy one here?"

It was clear that the other party was pointing fingers at them, so how could they possibly not fly into a rage?

"Calm down, you are acting as if I am talking about you. I don't think you should have anything to worry about unless... you have intimate relations with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe!" Lu Feng sneered coldly.

"What did you say?" Unable to hold back her rage any longer, Wei Ranxue slammed her palm on the table forcefully and stood up. Her powerful aura as a Saint realm expert gushed out as she roared, "I dare you to say that again!"

"Lu Feng, watch your mouth. We are all school heads of the Master Teacher Academy, members of the esteemed Ten Great Master Teachers of Hongyuan Empire. Who are you saying has intimate relations with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe?" Zhao Bingxu uttered menacingly with narrowed eyes.

"You will know who I am talking about very soon. Just that, I hope that you won't be too ashamed to raise your faces later on!" Lu Feng harrumphed in response.

“There’s no need to wait, I have been wanting to try your ‘Great Inarticulate Palm’ for some time now. Make your move!”

With a roar, Wei Ranxue raised her hands and released her full might as a Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle cultivator unreservedly.

Even though she specialized in terpsichorean arts, her fighting prowess still wasn’t something that one could underestimate. Before her blow even reached him, the sheer force of her offense already had the surrounding air compressed so tightly that it seemed it could burst at any moment.

“School Head Wei’s fighting prowess is far stronger than before!”

Feeling the incredible aura Wei Ranxue exuded, everyone was astonished.

Having been together for the past several centuries, they had a clear understanding of how powerful each of the others were. Who would have thought that in just a few days of absence, Wei Ranxue would make a breakthrough in both her cultivation and her terpsichorean arts?

Each movement and gesture of hers seemed to draw one deeper into a trance.

“Since School Head Wei wishes to try my Great Inarticulate Palm, it would be impolite for me to reject your request!” Harrumphing coldly, Lu Feng raised his palm, and a massive palm print appeared in the air.

The Great Inarticulate Palm, a Spirit pinnacle battle technique, Lu Feng’s strongest technique!

“Come!” Wei Ranxue raised her palm, and a surge of pure zhenqi shot forth from her hands.

The room wasn’t large, but having reached Saint realm, they had already gained an astounding level of control over their strength, minimizing the power loss in their techniques to the surroundings. As such, they need not worry about harming others in the area or destroying the room.

“Humph!” Facing Wei Ranxue’s attack, Lu Feng sneered coldly.

Not even bothering to stand up, he thrust his right hand forward, and the palm print floating in front of him flew forth to face Wei Ranxue’s attack.

Boom!

As the palm print and the surge of zhenqi collided, Wei Ranxue’s face paled, and she was forced to retreat several steps. At this turn of events, she couldn’t help but widen her eyes in shock.

“Half... Spiritual Perception realm?”

At Saint 2-dan Spiritual Perception realm, a cultivator would be able to open their Incipient Eye and awaken their spiritual perception. Through the spiritual perception, one would be granted a further and clearer view of one’s surroundings, allowing one to notice the crucial minor details that could determine the flow of a battle, thus enhancing one’s fighting prowess by leaps and bounds.

While Lu Feng hadn’t exactly reached this realm, he wasn’t too far from it anymore.

“No wonder...” Zhao Bingxu and the others narrowed their eyes in astonishment.

That explained why Lu Feng dared to utter those arrogant words, not fearing that he would offend them. It turned out that he had achieved a breakthrough in his cultivation!

“Looks like you aren’t that blind yet!” Lu Feng harrumphed coldly as an indomitable aura emanated from him. “Who else wants to try my Great Inarticulate Palm?”

“...” The crowd fell silent.

After all the years they had been together, they were well aware of the means that each of them possessed, so even in a duel, they would usually end in a draw. However, now that Lu Feng had reached Half-Spiritual Perception realm, he was already a step ahead of them all, becoming the number one expert of the Master Teacher Academy!

“Enough! You are all master teachers of the academy; this is no reason for you to fight with one another!” Mu shi bellowed furiously.

With a wave of his hands, his zhenqi shrouded the room. Using his unique technique, all forms of communication that could deliver information beyond the confines of the room, be it verbally or via Communication Jade Tokens, were terminated.

“Alright, I have already set up a barrier. Say whatever you need to!” Mu shi said impassively.

“Reporting to Mu shi, there is still another matter which I need your permission for...”

Looking at the shocked faces in the room, Lu Feng stood up and said authoritatively, “For further precaution, I wish to invite the Guardian Saint Artifact of our academy over... the Golden Origin Cauldron!”

“Golden Origin Cauldron?”

“The Guardian Saint Artifact that the Master Teacher Pavilion bestowed to our academy?”

“That is a real Saint-tier artifact! It might only be a cauldron, but it possesses its own sentience and spirit. With the strength it wields, it could slay Saint 2-dan or even 3-dan experts easily! Why would Lu Feng invite it to our Elder Conference?”

“Back when the headquarters bestowed the Golden Origin Cauldron to us, it said that other than in times of emergency, we are not to use it... Could he have really found something crucial?”

...

The Golden Origin Cauldron was the final trump card of the Master Teacher Academy. Unless they were faced with an invasion by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, they were not to use it. To invite it to their Elder Conference at this very moment... What was it for?

The expressions of the elders turned grim.

“Do you know what the inviting the Golden Origin Cauldron means?” Mu shi asked with narrowed eyes.

“I do, but the matter which I am going to speak of has significant implications, and that man possesses unbelievable means. In order to prevent any mishap from occurring, it is imperative that we make sufficient preparations beforehand. Otherwise... I fear that even with all of us here, we still might not be a match for him!” Lu Feng replied confidently.

Based on what Dong Xin said, Zhang Xuan had subordinated twenty Saint 1-dan Otherworldly Demons, and he could emanate a powerful killing intent which could render even Senior Byzantium Helios powerless. If they were to expose his identity, and the other party, cornered, were to retaliate, it wasn't certain whether they would be a match for him or not!

If they couldn't subdue his rampage as soon as possible, the Master Teacher Academy would suffer heavy losses.

“This...” The crowd glanced at one another, perplexed.

Just what could it be that would require even their greatest trump card to be taken out?

“As long as you understand. Since you believe that the Master Teacher Academy is in such deep peril, let us invite the Golden Origin Cauldron over!” Mu shi nodded.

Even though he had been sent to the academy by the headquarters to elect the next principal, he was ultimately still an outsider. He didn't wish to get too involved in the affairs of the academy. It was best for their internal matters to be resolved internally as well.

“Thank you, Mu shi!”

Receiving Mu shi's approval, Lu Feng clasped his fist before walking to the side of the room. He pressed his palm against the wall before saying, “I am Lu Feng, the stand-in principal of the Master Teacher Academy. I would like to invite Senior Golden Origin Cauldron to our conference!”

Hong long!

Following which, the room began to shake, and ‘jiya!’, the wall suddenly parted, and a massive cauldron flew out.

Peng!

It landed at the very center of the room with a resounding reverberation. With a deep voice, it said, “Don’t you know that I am resting? What is the matter?”

Artifacts that had reached Saint-tier had already gained sentience and were capable of thinking just like humans.

Lu Feng clasped his fist politely as he said, “An Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royal has appeared in the academy. I beseech senior to help us suppress him once he appears!”

“Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royalty?”

“Who?”

Hearing those words, all of those gathered in the room widened their eyes in astonishment.

An Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royal... had appeared in the academy?

Mu shi’s face darkened as well.

If there was truly such a fearsome existence around him, it was gross negligence on his part to not have noticed it.

Taking a step back, even if he didn’t notice it, surely she would have been able to?

“Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royalty? Are you certain?” The Golden Origin Cauldron was taken aback by Lu Feng’s revelation as well.

“I am absolutely certain!” Lu Feng nodded confidently.

“Alright. If a member of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe really appears in the Master Teacher Academy just as you have said, I will make a move and subdue him. However, if I don’t see him by the end of the day... for interrupting my sleep, don’t blame me if I reduce you to ashes!” The Golden Origin Cauldron harrumphed.

“Senior, rest assured. I will surely bring him before you...” Lu Feng smiled.

“Alright. Since you have already brought even Senior Golden Origin Cauldron here, hurry up and tell us what is going on!” Zhao Bingxu urged impatiently.

Lu Feng glanced at Zhao Bingxu and smirked before turning his attention back to the crowd. “Seems like someone is getting angsty. Don’t you worry, I will begin right now!

“Allow me to introduce all of you, this is Dong Xin, a Grade 5 student of our academy, the leader of the Dong Xin Faction, as well as a direct disciple who I have recently accepted... Alright, Dong Xin. Tell everyone the sight you saw ten days ago. There is no need to worry; I am here.”

“Yes!” Dong Xin nodded grimly. Taking a deep breath, she took a step forward.

She knew that this was as much a risk as an opportunity. Putting everything aside, her contribution in having uncovered a disguised Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royal would solidify her reputation as a master teacher, and many opportunities would come her way, allowing her to rise through the ranks.

“I am Dong Xin, a Grade 5 student of the Master Teacher Academy and a 6-star low-tier master teacher. In my name as a master teacher, I vow that everything that I am about to say is accurate and true, devoid of the slightest falsehood...”

Stepping to the very center of the room, Dong Xin raised her palm and swore on her name as a master teacher.

Seeing her action, the crowd nodded their heads grimly.

If a master teacher were to act against their vow, their faith would collapse, resulting in the instability and perhaps even a complete ruination of their state of mind, not to mention the severe punishments the Master Teacher Pavilion would impose on them. As such, there were very few master teachers who would dare to lie in a vow.

“Ten days ago, I visited a manor outside the academy and saw an Aura Sealing Formation. Out of curiosity, I remained in the area to observe it when I saw Senior Byzantium Helios

breaking out of the formation and escaping from it..." With a crisp voice, Dong Xin recounted what she had witnessed that day.

The entire room was silent, and everyone's complexion was awful.

This was especially so for School Head Mo and the others. They were shaking their heads, unwilling to believe what they were hearing.

Eventually, School Head Jiang Qingqin couldn't take it any longer and stood up. "You are saying that... Zhang laoshi ordered twenty subordinate Otherworldly Demons to pummel Senior Byzantium Helios?"

As the saying goes, the music at one's fingertips reflects one's inner self. He was privileged enough to have listened to Zhang laoshi's playing, and from it, he could feel a pure and dignified vibe. How could a man who could evoke such a vibe from his music possibly be an Otherworldly Demon?

Even if Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royalty could conceal their aura, they couldn't possibly disguise their state of mind as well!

"That's right!" Dong Xin was slightly fearful at School Head Jiang Qingqin's outburst, but she nodded affirmatively.

"Impossible! Zhang laoshi is a noble and straightforward man, how could he possibly be an Otherworldly Demon? Utter nonsense! In any case, I don't believe your words!"

Jiang Qingqin flung his sleeves furiously as he turned his sharp gaze to Lu Feng. "Lu Feng, are you making this up to exact vengeance on the humiliation Zhang laoshi brought upon you?"

"What did you call him? Zhang laoshi?" Lu Feng asked with a deep frown.

It was already bizarre to see the usually impassive and composed School Head Jiang flying into such an abrupt rage, but the term he used to address the other party...

Zhang shi and Zhang laoshi, there was just a syllable of difference, but the meaning changed completely.

The former was just a respectful manner to address a fellow master teacher whereas the latter was how a student addressed their teacher.

“Indeed, I am Zhang laoshi’s student. You dare insult my teacher by accusing him of being an Otherworldly Demon, do you think that I will just stand idly and allow you to fling mud on him like that?” Jiang Qingqin bellowed furiously.

“Teacher? You are an esteemed school head, and yet you acknowledged a student as your teacher?” Lu Feng nearly went mad.

Is there something wrong with that fellow’s head?

I thought that you possess a transcendental view of the world?

I even respected you for that!

How in the world did you end up acknowledging Zhang Xuan as your teacher in the blink of an eye?

Are you out of your mind?

841 Byzantium Helios Beast's Breakthrough

This feeling resonated not only within Lu Feng but with the others in the room as well.

Sure enough, there were several school heads among the group who were impressed by Zhang Xuan's capability, but in view of their own standing, they had still held themselves back.

School Head Mo had tried to take him in as his direct disciple, Zhao Bingxu had offered to take him in as his teacher's student, and even Wei Ranxue had only viewed him as a fellow peer that she could consult with... Yet, this fellow had actually gone beyond that and acknowledged him as his teacher!

The standing of a teacher was inherently higher than a student's.

Considering that we are all peers, if you have acknowledged him as your teacher, doesn't that mean that we are all his juniors?

"That's right!" School Head Jiang harrumphed coldly. "If this is the matter you wish to confer on today, I don't think there is any need for me to listen any further!"

After saying those words, he turned to the door to leave.

That Lu Feng had painted such a grim picture, but in the end, he was just making use of this opportunity to insult his teacher and exact vengeance for the previous humiliation he had suffered. Since that was the case, there was no point in him remaining in this conference!

Lu Feng's face darkened, and he bellowed furiously, "You can't leave!"

After all the measures he had taken to ensure absolute secrecy, if Jiang Qingqin were to leave to reveal the news to Zhang

Xuan, the latter could very well make preparations in advance and flee!

“Oh? Are you going to attack me if I insist on leaving?” Jiang Qingqin’s eyebrows shot up as he turned around to assess Lu Feng with a frosty gaze.

“That’s right! No one shall leave until this matter is resolved! I won’t go easy on anyone who attempts to do so...” Lu Feng uttered coldly with eyes narrowed menacingly.

Without any hesitation, he raised his palm and executed the Great Inarticulate Palm once more. A massive palm print flew toward School Head Jiang with astounding momentum.

The strength of a Half-Spiritual Perception realm expert complemented with a Spirit pinnacle battle technique was nothing to scoff at. Under the immense force of the palm technique, the air was compressed to such a degree that a deafening sonic boom erupted, threatening to rupture one’s ears.

“Others might fear you, but not me!”

Seeing that Lu Feng had truly launched an attack against him, Jiang Qingqin swiftly flicked his wrist, and a massive zither appeared before him, floating in the air quietly. With light and agile movements from his ten fingers, a sharp melody pervaded the room.

Tingg tanggg! Tinggg tangggg!

A torrent of sound waves gushed forward.

Boom!

As soon as the sound wave came into contact with the palm print, Lu Feng abruptly exerted more force to overcome the other party’s sound wave in a single push. However, to his horror, even when he had exerted his full strength, he couldn’t withstand the might of the sound wave at all.

Under the onslaught of the music wave, his face reddened instantaneously as he was pushed back several steps, and blood spewed from his mouth!

“7-star demonic tunist?” Lu Feng widened his eyes in shock.

The other party's cultivation might not be on par with his, but his comprehension of demonic tunes had reached 7-star. With his current fighting prowess, not even a Saint 2-dan cultivator would necessarily be a match for him!

In just a momentary clash, his soul had been already severely wounded.

“Indeed. Under teacher's guidance, I managed to achieve a breakthrough!” Jiang Qingqin said proudly.

If not for Zhang laoshi, he might very well have been stuck at 6-star for his entire life... As such, how could he allow anyone to insult his teacher like that?

“Mu shi...”

Lu Feng had thought that with his recent breakthrough, he would have been the number one expert of the Ten Great Master Teachers. He had never thought that he would be defeated by Jiang Qingqin in a single blow. Indignant, he could only turn to Mu shi for help.

“Alright, let's end this here. School Head Jiang, you calm down as well. Since Dong Xin has vowed on this matter in her name as a master teacher, this matter is indeed worth looking into!”

Mu shi waved his hand and said, “Since things have already gotten to this point, why don't we invite Zhang shi over to explain himself? If this truly is a misunderstanding, he will surely be able to come up with a logical explanation to convince us. Otherwise, if he truly is an Otherworldly Demon... we mustn't allow him to get away!”

“This...” Seeing that even Mu shi had spoken up, Jiang Qingqin hesitated for a moment before returning to his seat. “Alright, I will listen to Mu shi's arrangements. However, I hope for Zhang laoshi to be invited over in his capacity as a master teacher and not as a suspect. I don't want to see anyone doing anything disrespectful to my teacher!”

“Fair enough!” Mu shi nodded.

Even though Dong Xin had vowed on the matter using her name as a master teacher, it would be unfair to treat Zhang

Xuan as a criminal just based on her story alone. On top of that, Zhang Xuan was an incredibly talented master teacher possessing the Eye of Insight as well. If they were to capture him and eventually find out that everything was just a misunderstanding, this could create a rift between him and the Master Teacher Academy.

Besides, if the other party really was an Otherworldly Demon, if they were to send their forces out to apprehend him, he might notice that something was wrong and escape. That could potentially lead to a disaster.

“Alright then. I have no more objections!” Jiang Qingqin relented.

“Lu Feng, you heard it. Dispatch someone to invite Zhang Xuan over to have his testimony cross-examined with Dong Xin’s. Let’s hope that he can explain himself well, or else... I will have him eliminated personally!” Mu shi said.

“Yes!”

Nodding, Lu Feng walked out of the Elder Hall to send his men to invite Zhang Xuan over before returning back to his seat and waiting patiently.

...

While a huge commotion was going on there, Zhang Xuan had ridden the Great Violetwing Beast all the way to his manor and landed.

As soon as he walked into the main hall, he was welcomed by the Byzantium Helios Beast and Sun Qiang.

“Master!”

At that very moment, the Byzantium Helios Beast commanded an aura overflowing with vitality and power, reminiscent of a dragon. Over the past few days, it had grown many times stronger than before, and its eyes reflected a wise and composed gleam.

“You have achieved a breakthrough?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

Saint 2-dan Spiritual Perception realm. While the strength growth one would experience from a breakthrough to this realm wasn't as exaggerated as when advancing from Nascent Saint to Saint realm, it did induce an immense growth in one's fighting prowess.

This was due to the awakening of one's spiritual perception. Through the spiritual perception, one could view one's surroundings with greater clarity than before. Even the slightest movement wouldn't escape one's notice. This wasn't something that one's physical eye could possibly compare to.

There were even many that said that Saint 2-dan was the first step to comprehending the many secrets arts that Saints wielded, and it was only after awakening one's Incipient Eye could one be considered a true Saint.

The Byzantium Helios Beast nodded. "That's right!"

From the beginning, it hadn't been far from making a breakthrough. Through assimilating the Ancient Ape's inner core, which shared many common properties with it, it had managed to find the impetus to overcome its bottleneck and reach Saint 2-dan.

"Good!" Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed a huge gourd over. "This is Earth Vein Spirit Essence; you will find it useful in helping to reinforce your cultivation!"

It was not without reason that so many saint beasts in the Cloudmist Ridge had guarded the Earth Vein Spirit Essence so tightly. It had exceptional effects on saint beasts.

"Thank you, master!"

Uncorking the cap, the Byzantium Helios Beast immediately felt the condensed spiritual energy harnessed within the gourd, and it shuddered in agitation.

With his instincts, it could instantaneously tell that the spirit essence contained within the gourd was worth more than dozens of high-tier spirit stones.

To hand something as valuable as that to it so easily, this reflected the deep trust that Zhang Xuan had in it.

Zhang Xuan turned to Sun Qiang and asked, “Un. Did anything happen while I was gone?”

“Nothing much, just that...” At which, Sun Qiang frowned. “Hu Yaoyao sent a message several days ago saying that our manor seems to be under surveillance...”

“Under surveillance?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Hu Yaoyao was the leader of the Bewitching Devil Faction, controlling a huge pack of experts. Since she had sent word of it, the news was likely to be authentic.

“Have you found out who those people are?”

“I tried looking into the matter several times, but the other party was too strong. They managed to escape my detection each time...” Sun Qiang’s face reddened in embarrassment.

His current cultivation realm hadn’t even reached Consonant Spirit realm yet. While his strength could be considered fairly powerful in a Tier-2 Empire, it was still lacking in the capital of a Tier-1 Empire like Hongyuan City.

“Master, I know of this matter. Those men keeping watch on the manor are the elders from the Master Teacher Academy!” the Byzantium Helios Beast said.

Having achieved a breakthrough to Spiritual Perception realm, he could easily perceive the happenings in his surroundings.

Sun Qiang might not have been able to find those creeping around the manor, but there was no way they could have escaped the Byzantium Helios Beast’s notice.

“Elders of the Master Teacher Academy? Why are they keeping watch on me?” Zhang Xuan was bewildered.

Even though he did cripple a couple of schools, wasn’t sending the esteemed elders on the academy to keep tabs on him a little, no, way too excessive?

“When I achieved the breakthrough to Saint 2-dan and awakened by spiritual perception, I happened to overhear their conversation, and it seems like... that lad, Lu Feng, intends to call for an Elder Conference to have you judged. I am not too sure about the details as well as they didn’t say too much, but I

think you should remain on your guard for the next few days,” the Byzantium Helios Beast said.

“Lu Feng wants to have me judged?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

After he had made his round in the Apothecary School, Lu Feng had once assembled the Ten Great Master Teachers to push forward a motion to have his master teacher license revoked, but his plan had fallen through eventually.

School Head Jiang had already told him of this matter when he was at the Demonic Tunist School. Could that fellow be up to something again?

But if he didn’t succeed the first time, surely the second time would be nothing to worry about too...

“From the looks of it, I think they might have found some important evidence to use against you,” the Byzantium Helios Beast said.

“Based on what I heard, not only did they invite Pavilion Master Mo Gaoyuan over, they even called forth the Saint-tier artifact, ‘Golden Origin Cauldron’!”

The surveilling elders didn’t seem to know too much of the matter either. Thus, even though the Byzantium Helios Beast had been eavesdropping on their conversation, he only knew fragments of the story.

“Golden Origin Cauldron?”

“That is the Guardian Saint Artifact of the Master Teacher Academy. It is usually under the control of the principal, and it wields the power to destroy even Saint realm 3-dan experts!”

The Byzantium Helios Beast frowned. “However, after my master died, the Golden Origin Cauldron fell into a deep sleep, and no one has been able to command it since then. This would likely remain the case unless... an invasion of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe occurs!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows knitted together.

If what the Byzantium Helios Beast said was true, this was indeed a huge matter!

But... what did sending elders to surveil him have to do with an invasion of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe? Could it be that... news regarding his Otherworldly Demon puppets and Vicious had leaked?

If that was the case, he was indeed in deep trouble.

Putting aside how it would be ludicrous to most for a master teacher to have successfully taken in one of the top brass of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe as his subordinate, just the fact that he had so many Otherworldly Demon puppets in his possession was already something he couldn't possibly hope to explain well.

Just as Zhang Xuan was deep in thought, attempting to figure out what Lu Feng was up to, Zheng Yang suddenly rushed into the room.

“Teacher...”

Zhang Xuan turned to him and asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Teacher, Vice School Head Zhou and Vice School Head Wei from the Apothecary School are here. They said that they are here to invite you to the academy to discuss an important matter,” Zheng Yang said.

“Invite?” Zhang Xuan’s frown deepened. “How are their attitudes?”

“Their attitudes? Amicable and polite, I guess... They are currently waiting in the guest lounge!” Zheng Yang replied.

In truth, he had also felt that something was off about this matter. After the mess that his teacher had caused at the Apothecary School, the relationship between the two had been like fire and water, incapable of coexisting simultaneously. For the latter to suddenly pay their manor a visit and extend an invitation to the Master Teacher Academy... there was truly something bizarre about the situation.

Their attitudes are amicable and polite? And yet, they still sent men to surveil me? Looks like they did manage to grasp hold of some kind of handle over me, and they are afraid that I might flee after learning of it...

A sharp glint flashed through Zhang Xuan's eyes.

After sending elders to surveil him and calling forth the trump card of the Master Teacher Academy, they abruptly sent vice school heads to invite him over to the academy politely...

Their incongruous actions hinted at treacherous currents hidden beneath the calm exterior.

On top of that, he had come into contact with Lu Feng before. He was certain that the latter wasn't one who could let go of his grudges easily.

Something was definitely amiss!

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan said, "Byzantium Helios, for the time being, I need you to get into the Myriad Anthive Nest. I might require your presence later on!"

"Yes!" the Byzantium Helios Beast nodded before entering the Myriad Anthive Nest.

At this moment, the Anthive Nest was already more than a dozen meters wide, so while there wasn't sufficient space for him to move about, it was, at the very least, not cramped.

After this was done, Zhang Xuan was just about to head out to meet the vice school heads when he abruptly halted. He gestured for Sun Qiang and Zheng Yang to head to the guest lounge, and after confirming that there was no one around, he brought his clone out and passed his storage ring to him.

Vicious and the newly-acquired scroll containing Kong Shi's personal handwriting were in the storage ring.

Wherever the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was concerned, master teachers would tend to act by the adage, 'better safe than sorry'. On the off chance that he found himself cornered... it would be better to leave a hand.

His clone and he shared the same soul, so as long as his clone wasn't kept in the storage ring, they could communicate remotely with one another.

842 Byzantium Lad, Explain It to Them!

In the guest lounge, Vice School Head Zhou and Vice School Head Wei were conversing with one another via zhenqi telepathy.

“Do you think that he will try to escape?”

While the duo wasn't too sure what was going on either, the fact that the school head had had Zhang Xuan's manor surveilled for the past few days meant that he was going to make his move on Zhang Xuan.

“If he refuses to come with us or attempts to escape, we will just have to act as the school head commands and eliminate him!” Vice School Head Wei replied grimly.

“But if we really do so, there is no way School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others will let this matter rest easily...” Vice School Head Zhou said worriedly.

When they first heard the order, they were nearly scared out of their wits.

Considering the prestige that Zhang Xuan wielded among the student populace, as well as his relationship with the various school heads, if he were to be killed... the Apothecary School would fall into deep trouble!

“I am also worried, but there is no way around it. This is a direct command from the school head; we can't disobey it. Don't worry, he must have his own reasons for giving such a command,” Vice School Head Wei replied.

Lu Feng wasn't a reckless person, so he must have understood the implications of the order, too. There had to be a good reason for him to make such a command despite that. As subordinates, they would just have to do as they were told.

“You are right; there is no point thinking about it too much. We should just do as we were told...” Vice School Head Zhou

nodded.

At that moment, a young man suddenly appeared by the doorway.

Stepping into the room, Zhang Xuan clasped his fist and greeted them. “Vice School Head Zhou, Vice School Head Wei!”

He had met Zhou Qing during the academy’s student recruitment period; he was the elder who had helped Luo Ruoxin tidy up the podium for her public lecture.

Vice School Head Zhou stood up and said, “Zhang shi! We are here to invite you to the academy so as to discuss a matter...”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had not opted to flee, the duo subconsciously heaved a sigh of relief.

“Can you tell me what the matter is regarding?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“I am not too sure about the details either. However, this matter seems to be of grave importance, so I will have to ask Zhang shi to not turn us down,” Vice School Head Zhou said with a bitter smile.

Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before nodding. “I see. Alright then, lead the way!”

With all the preparations Lu Feng had made, surveilling his manor and calling forth the Golden Origin Cauldron, there was no way he was going to let Zhang Xuan escape easily. Since it was impossible to avoid it, there was no point in delaying the inevitable.

“Yes, this way please!” Seeing how Zhang Xuan agreed to it readily, Vice School Head Zhou hurriedly gestured forward, as if fearing that the other party would change his mind.

Zhang Xuan’s manor wasn’t too far away from the Master Teacher Academy.

Under the lead of the two vice school heads, it didn’t take too long before they arrived at the Elder Hall.

Pushing the door open, Zhang Xuan walked in.

The first thing he noticed upon stepping into the Elder Hall was the ancient aura that permeated the room.

The Elder Hall had been around ever since the establishment of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, and it had been several millenniums since then. The design and the architecture of the room formed a stark contrast with the rest of the Master Teacher Academy, leaving one feeling as if one had stepped into the past.

Gazing around the room, Zhang Xuan saw the Ten Great Master Teachers and Pavilion Master Mo seated around, and a massive cauldron stood at the center of the room.

Hmm? Mu shi?

Suddenly, Zhang Xuan caught sight of a familiar figure. It was the man who had acknowledged him as his grandteacher, Mu Yuan!

Why would that fellow be in the academy as well?

But despite Zhang Xuan's surprise, he didn't allow his etiquette to fall short. He clasped his fist and greeted School Head Mo and the others, but upon reaching Lu Feng, he placed his hands behind his back and said, "Junior, what are you waiting for? Aren't you going to pay your respects to me?"

Since Lu Feng was trying to do him in, there was no need to show any courtesy to him.

"You..." Hearing those words, Lu Feng nearly choked on his anger.

Was that fellow really that brave, or was it plain naivety?

It was such a solemn setting; did he really not feel the slightest bit of fear?

Lu Feng narrowed his eyes and flicked his wrist. 'Jiya!', the door closed, and a formation seemed to have started operating within the room, leaving the air slightly heavy.

With the doors closed, Lu Feng glared at Zhang Xuan with killing intent reflected in his eyes. "Zhang Xuan, your identity has already been exposed. If you plead guilty, we might still

consider sparing you. Otherwise... not only will you be killed, those who are related to you will be implicated as well!”

Zhang Xuan frowned, seemingly confused by what Lu Feng had said. “My identity has been exposed?”

“Still feigning ignorance? Dong Xin, tell him!” Lu Feng sneered coldly as he gestured Dong Xin forward.

“Yes!” Dong Xin nodded. “Zhang Xuan, I saw with my own eyes how you used a formation to confine Senior Byzantium Helios, and after the latter broke out, you had twenty of your Otherworldly Demon subordinates pummel him...”

“You saw with your own eyes?” Zhang Xuan was momentarily stunned.

Ten days ago, when he was teaching the Byzantium Helios Beast a lesson, the latter managed to escape due to the formation being too weak... Could that lady have been hiding in his manor at that time?

It seemed the formations that King Huai had prepared for the manor weren't reliable after all. He would have to work on them when he returned later on. Otherwise, if others could enter and leave his manor as they pleased, it could pose as a potential source of trouble.

“That's right. I swear on my name as a master teacher that I saw you command your subordinates to assault Senior Byzantium Helios. From start to end, you said a total of three sentences, the first one being, ‘Trying to escape? Vicious, take it down!’, followed by ‘The rest of you, get him! Pummel him to death!’, and finally, when Senior Byzantium Helios passed out, you said, ‘It fainted again...’. Is there any mistake with what I said?” Dong Xin asked.

She would never forget what she had seen that day. The viciousness that the young man before her had shown had been imprinted deep in her mind.

“You do have a good memory...” Seeing how the other party was able to recount what happened that day perfectly, Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly.

Unaware of the Byzantium Helios Beast's true identity then, he had thought that it was a crony of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Naturally, he wouldn't show any mercy to it.

"He is admitting to it?"

Realizing that Zhang Xuan wasn't denying the matter, everyone was flabbergasted. If he had truly commanded Otherworldly Demons to pummel Senior Byzantium Helios...

Was he really from the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe then?

Unable to believe what he had just heard, School Head Mo stood up and asked in agitation, "Zhang shi, did you really assault Senior Byzantium Helios?"

He was the first one to notice that Senior Byzantium Helios had gone missing, kidnapped by more than a dozen Otherworldly Demons as deduced from the traces left behind. The Master Teacher Academy had devoted its manpower to searching for it for half a month now, but there were no signs of him anywhere.

He had contemplated many possibilities, but never could he have imagined that Zhang Xuan would be the culprit!

"I... did order my men to pummel it before," Zhang Xuan confessed.

"It's good that you have admitted to it!"

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had confessed to the matter, Lu Feng was taken aback for a moment, not expecting everything to go so smoothly, before a sharp glint flashed across his eyes. He hurriedly turned around and said righteously, "Mu shi and Senior Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan has already admitted to his identity as an Otherworldly Demon. I ask of you to have him killed so that no other human will be harmed by him!"

With a deep frown, Mu shi turned to Zhang Xuan and questioned authoritatively, "Zhang Xuan, what else do you have to say for yourself?"

If Zhang Xuan truly turned out to be an Otherworldly Demon, then regardless of the other party's close ties with Luo shi, he

would have to fulfill his responsibilities as a master teacher and eliminate the other party.

Seeing Lu Feng eagerly pinning such a huge crime on him, Zhang Xuan rolled his eyes. “Wait a moment. When did I admit to being an Otherworldly Demon?”

“Why? Are you going to start denying the matter now? Justice will eventually fall on all evildoers; you won’t be getting out of this no matter how well you argue your case. Since you have already admitted to assaulting Senior Byzantium Helios, what else can you be if not an Otherworldly Demon?” Lu Feng sneered.

“I did order my men to pummel the Byzantium Helios Beast before, but how does that prove that I am an Otherworldly Demon?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

“There is no one in this academy who doesn’t know that Senior Byzantium Helios is the tamed beast of the old principal. Assaulting him is equivalent to insulting our entire Master Teacher Academy, insulting us master teachers...” Lu Feng bellowed authoritatively.

“Insulting the Master Teacher Academy and master teachers? Your imagination sure is wild...” Zhang Xuan shrugged helplessly. “If that is really what you think, there is nothing that I can say... I can only have the Byzantium Helios Beast explain the matter to you then!”

Saying those words, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and the football-like Myriad Anthive Nest appeared in the room. The nest jolted for an instant, and the massive figure of the Byzantium Helios Beast abruptly emerged from it.

“It is Senior Byzantium Helios!”

“Senior Byzantium Helios isn’t injured at all?”

Upon seeing the Byzantium Helios Beast appearing before their eyes, everyone was stunned for an instant before doubts began filling their minds.

Not only was Senior Byzantium Helios not weakened from his ‘injuries’ as they had thought he would be, he was even

overflowing with vitality and power. In fact... it seemed like he was even stronger than before!

Wasn't he pummeled to the state of near death?

What was going on?

Gazes swiftly turned to Dong Xin, waiting for her to explain the matter.

Feeling the intent gazes on her, Dong Xin's face paled. She could hardly believe what she was seeing as well.

She had personally witnessed the saint beast writhing on the floor in pain and passing out... But not only was Senior Byzantium Helios completely fine, he had even grown stronger!

More importantly... when she first met the latter, he had been trying to escape from Zhang Xuan! Yet, at this very moment, he was standing motionlessly, seemingly devoid of any hostility for Zhang Xuan!

She wasn't the only one who went pale at this situation. Lu Feng also felt an ominous premonition when he saw Senior Byzantium Helios appearing before him, and his entire body stiffened. Just as he was about to speak, the young man before him beat him to it.

“Byzantium Lad, Junior Lu Feng over here claims that I am an Otherworldly Demon because I had my men pummel you. Explain this matter to everyone for me!”

“Byzantium Lad?”

Hearing how Zhang Xuan addressed Senior Byzantium Helios, the crowd nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

School Head Mo's eyes swam around the place in frenzy.

Everyone in the room respectfully addresses him as 'senior', but you actually cut all formalities and even called him a 'lad'... Aren't you afraid of him killing you with a slap?

He was a beast tamer, so he understood just how proud Senior Byzantium Helios was.

Even he had to treat the other party with the utmost respect, not daring to even speak loudly.

To address Senior Byzantium Helios in such a disrespectful manner... Aren't you pushing it too far?

But before they could recover from their shock, the esteemed Senior Byzantium Helios clasped his fist and bowed right before their eyes. "Yes, master!"

"Master?"

"Senior Byzantium Helios... is addressing Zhang Shi as his master?"

Lu Feng felt the world before him turning dark, and the other nine master teachers also swayed weakly, feeling as if their perception of the world had been completely shattered.

Who was Byzantium Helios Beast?

The tamed beast of the old principal, possessing a standing even higher than the Ten Great Master Teachers of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, second to only the Golden Origin Cauldron. With such standing, it was inevitable that his pride would be so large that it could reach the clouds.

"Master is a Cele... a master teacher recognized by the Master Teacher Pavilion, so how could he be an Otherworldly Demon? That is utter nonsense! The reason he had someone beat me up was to help me achieve a breakthrough in my cultivation!"

Paying no heed to everyone's shock, the Byzantium Helios Beast drove its cultivation, and an overwhelmingly powerful aura gushed out from its body.

Hong long!

Under that immense pressure, everyone's souls jolted in astonishment.

The Byzantium Helios Beast had been thinking about how it should address this matter for a while now.

If he were to say that it was pummeled due to a misunderstanding, he could very well shatter his image as an

esteemed elder of the Master Teacher Academy. If that was going to be the case, he might as well claim that the other party was helping him achieve a breakthrough.

In any case, he did manage to achieve a breakthrough to Saint 2-dan.

“Saint 2-dan... Spiritual Perception realm!”

“Senior Byzantium Helios managed to achieve a breakthrough...”

Everyone was stunned once more.

It was extremely hard for natural-born saint beasts like the Byzantium Helios Beast to achieve a breakthrough in their cultivation. This was the reason why, despite the years it had spent with the old principal, it had remained trapped at Saint 1-dan pinnacle, unable to overcome its bottleneck.

Yet, in just half a month of absence, it had managed to take the final step forward and reached Saint 2-dan...

It was just a moment ago that they had thought that Zhang Xuan was an Otherworldly Demon because he had assaulted Senior Byzantium Helios. But just shortly after that, Senior Byzantium Helios had personally stepped forward and revealed that Zhang Xuan was his master and even displayed his newfound strength.

This turnaround was so swift that they could hardly keep up.

843 Who Is Your Teacher?

“Indeed! The reason I didn’t contact you all is because I was at a crucial moment in my breakthrough, so I was unable to divert my attention,” the Byzantium Helios Beast said.

“If not for my master, I could have been trapped at Saint 1-dan pinnacle for my entire life!”

What it was saying was the truth.

For nearly twenty days, when it wasn’t being pummeled, it would be tightly squashed within the narrow space of the Myriad Anthive Nest, where it couldn’t even stretch its limbs. This had led to an immense frustration and rage bubbling within it, but coincidentally, that had formed the foundation of its breakthrough as well.

Spiritual Perception realm was closely tied to one’s soul and state of mind. As indignant as it was at the suffering it had been put through, it had to admit that the experience had tempered its mental resilience.

If not for this experience, even with the inner core of the Ancient Ape, it was questionable whether the Byzantium Helios Beast would have been able to achieve a breakthrough or not.

Hearing those words, the crowd fell silent.

It wasn’t uncommon for cultivators to go into seclusion for several months or even years at once. Going into seclusion for half a month was indeed not much.

Realizing that the tables had turned, Zhao Bingxu was the first to counterattack. “As the tamed beast of our old principal, Senior Byzantium Helios has contributed greatly to our academy. I believe I don’t have to say this, but Zhang Shi has really done our academy a great favor this time around... Yet, despite all he has done, you accused him of being an Otherworldly Demon! Lu Feng, if you don’t explain yourself well today, I will make sure you are charged for aspersion

even if I have to bring this matter all the way up to Qingyuan Empire!”

You said that Zhang shi had pummeled Senior Byzantium Helios and thus was an Otherworldly Demon, but now, even the ‘victim’ has stepped forward to clarify the matter... What else do you have to say?

Hearing those words, Lu Feng’s face warped in savagery, and veins began popping up at his temple. He felt so stifled within that he could puke blood.

He had thought that with this intelligence, he would be able to have Zhang Xuan begging him for mercy. Who could have known that the situation would end up turning on him instead?

Standing by the side, Dong Xin, who had been watching the entire scene throughout, trembled uncontrollably as well. If she could, she would have loved to disappear that very moment.

She had seen with her own eyes how Zhang Xuan had viciously ordered his subordinates to pummel Senior Byzantium Helios, how did it turn into helping the other party achieve a breakthrough in the blink of an eye?

Where in the world could one find a person pummeling another to the point of near death to help him achieve a breakthrough?

In that instant, a thought suddenly emerged in Dong Xin’s mind. “Wait a moment! Could it be...”

She immediately clasped her fist and said, “Mu shi, Senior Golden Origin Cauldron, and school heads, I have a hypothesis in mind, but I am not sure if it will be appropriate for me to speak of it!”

“Feel free to speak!” Mu shi nodded.

“I am certain that I saw Zhang Xuan ordering his subordinates to pummel Senior Byzantium Helios, but at this moment, Senior Byzantium Helios is speaking in his stead... I find that there is something really unnatural about this situation. Thus, I am thinking, could it be possible that Senior Byzantium Helios is being threatened? Maybe there is something he is unable to

tell us about, or perhaps, the very reason for the pummeling might have been to make Senior Byzantium Helios submit!” Dong Xin said.

She knew what she had seen, and she was certain that there had been tension and hostility between Zhang Xuan and Senior Byzantium Helios back then. Yet, all of this had disappeared all of a sudden, and the latter had even acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its master. Had it been anyone else, they wouldn't have been able to believe it either.

For one's attitude to change that quickly, there could only be one possibility—he was being blackmailed!

“You mean that he is being coerced into saying those words?” Mu shi frowned.

The other school heads fell into deep contemplation upon hearing those words, too.

Such a situation had indeed happened before.

Even if Zhang Xuan was a disguised Otherworldly Demon, he had spent some time as a master teacher, so it wouldn't be too surprising for him to be capable of spinning lies that could convince even them.

“Indeed. Everyone knows that Senior Byzantium Helios is deeply loyal to the old principal. So far, we don't even know whether the old principal is alive or dead, and for Senior Byzantium Helios to acknowledge another man as his master under such uncertain circumstances... I find that hard to believe!” Lu Feng's eyes lit up upon hearing Dong Xin's words, and he immediately leaped at the opportunity to build on it.

It was true that the old principal had gone missing on an expedition in an ancient domain, but until his corpse was found, it was impossible to conclusively tell whether he was alive or dead.

Considering the loyalty Byzantium Helios Beast had for the old principal, to acknowledge another man as its master while its old master could still be alive, there was indeed something really suspicious about the situation.

Chen Chengxun stood up and said, “Could it be that Zhang Xuan possesses some news regarding the old principal, and he is using it to threaten Senior Byzantium Helios into acknowledging him as his master and speak on his behalf? Or perhaps... if he is truly an Otherworldly Demonic Tribe royal, he could very well be using some kind of special means unknown to us!”

He was on the same boat as Lu Feng. Sink or swim, their fates were already closely tied together.

Hearing those words, Mu shi had no choice but to rethink the matter.

If his old friend was truly alive, and Zhang Xuan was using this piece of news to coerce the Byzantium Helios Beast into doing his bidding, given the loyalty of the latter, it was indeed highly likely that the latter would speak on Zhang Xuan’s behalf.

“Until we can confirm whether Senior Byzantium Helios has been coerced or not, I think we should invalidate his testimony on the grounds of reliability!” Lu Feng said.

“You... Audacious!”

Not expecting that someone would use this kind of ridiculous theory to cast suspicion on his words, the Byzantium Helios Beast’s face turned scarlet, and he bellowed furiously, “Every single word of mine comes straight from my heart, how is it unreliable?”

“Senior Byzantium Helios, please calm down! The Otherworldly Demons specialize in beguiling the heart, so until we can ascertain that you were not subjected to such means, it is difficult for us to determine the authenticity of your words. We have to ask for your understanding on this matter!” Lu Feng said.

Before they had been eradicated, the soul oracles had once sided with the Otherworldly Demons. From them, the Otherworldly Demons had learned some techniques relating to the manipulation of the soul as well.

Even if Dong Xin's testimony was unreliable and Zhang Xuan had truly helped the Byzantium Helios Beast achieved a breakthrough, it was still hard to believe that someone as loyal as the Byzantium Helios Beast would abandon its possibly still living master and acknowledge a man whom it had barely known for half a month as its master.

At this point, Pavilion Master Mo, who had been watching the scene silently all this while, suddenly spoke up. "School Head Lu, if we start delving into such conspiracy theories, can I also claim that you have been beguiled by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe into plotting against a talented master teacher who possesses the Eye of Insight?"

School Head Mo harrumphed in agreement as he stroked his beard.

"Indeed! All of us are more than aware of the significance of a master teacher possessing the Eye of Insight to mankind, and yet, School Head Lu has intentionally acted against Zhang Xuan time and time again. Could it be possible that you are an Otherworldly Demon in disguise?"

Sure, you might have cast suspicion on Senior Byzantium Helios's words... But how credible are your words compared to his?

"You..."

Not expecting the duo to counterattack from such an angle, even pinning such a huge crime on him, Lu Feng nearly spurted blood. Left with no choice, he could only wave his hands and relent.

"Fine! We will get nowhere with that, so let us put that aside for the moment... Even if Senior Byzantium Helios's testimony holds, surely the matter of Zhang Xuan having Otherworldly Demons subordinated to him is a fact that cannot be disputed? We visited Leiyuan Peak, the place where Senior Byzantium Helios was last seen before his disappearance, and I believe we can all agree that the lingering aura and remaining traces there belonged to Otherworldly Demons!"

According to Dong Xin's description, not only did Zhang Xuan assault Senior Byzantium Helios, he had an army of Otherworldly Demon subordinates as well.

That was also the most crucial point to proving that Zhang Xuan was an Otherworldly Demon.

Furthermore, since all of the school heads had visited Leiyuan Peak to investigate Senior Byzantium Helios's 'kidnapping', they wouldn't be able to refute this point.

And as expected, School Head Mo, School Head Zhao, and the others all fell silent.

Given Zhang Xuan's current cultivation realm, there was no way he could be Senior Byzantium Helios's match without any external help. Furthermore, Zhang Xuan had also acknowledged that he had ordered his 'men' to pummel Senior Byzantium Helios.

Could he really have Otherworldly Demons as his subordinates?

If that was really the case, that would complicate matters.

Master teachers were banned from coming into close contact with Otherworldly Demons, and most would often refrain from doing so as well in order to avoid suspicion.

"Otherworldly Demon subordinates... Do you mean this?"

Knowing that this matter would become a permanent stain on his record if he failed to explain himself well today, he flicked his wrist, and an Otherworldly Demon puppet appeared before him.

"I believe that with everyone's eye of discernment, you should be able to tell that this is a puppet forged out of the body of an Otherworldly Demon!" Zhang Xuan said.

"Indeed!"

"This is a puppet forged out of an Otherworldly Demon!"

The crowd examined the puppet before them for a moment before nodding in agreement.

All of those gathered there were 6-star pinnacle master teachers, and unlike Dong Xin, who had only seen the puppets from afar, they were examining it in close proximity as well. Whether it was a puppet or a real Otherworldly Demon, they were more than capable of differentiating.

“As School Head Zhao will know, before enrolling at the academy, I once accompanied Luo Qiqi, Princess Yu Fei-er, and a few others into an underground chamber, and in there, we managed to stumble upon Elder Wu Yangzi’s heritage,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Un!” Zhao Bingxu nodded, confirming his words.

He had compiled a report on it and sent it to the other school heads as well, so they should be aware of the matter, too.

“The ‘Otherworldly Demons’ mentioned earlier are actually puppets forged by Elder Wu Yangzi back when he was still alive, and I only managed to obtain them out of a stroke of luck!” Zhang Xuan explained.

“Master teachers are indeed forbidden from coming into contact with Otherworldly Demons, but Elder Wu Yangzi had already forged them into puppets to serve mankind. Even if I haven’t contributed to mankind through them, at the very least, my possession of them can’t be considered a sin, right?”

Everyone was stunned.

They had thought that Zhang Xuan’s subordinates were Otherworldly Demons, but to think that they were only puppets... Puppets were mindless and possessed no sentience of their own. Unless they were commanded to do so, they wouldn’t be able to hurt anyone.

Thus, there was no harm in Zhang Xuan possessing them.

After studying the puppet carefully, Mu shi remarked, “This is indeed a mindless puppet, and the manner in which it was forged does bear a striking resemblance with Wu Yangzi’s smithing technique...”

The puppets had personally been forged by Wu Yangzi during his captivity in the underground chamber. Precious materials

had been devoted to the forging process, so each of the puppets was an invaluable treasure.

“However... this puppet still harnesses killing intent within its body, and it retains its innate instincts as an Otherworldly Demon. Even Wu Yangzi might not have been able to tame it, so how did you make it follow your orders obediently?”

Realizing the crux of the matter, Mu shi frowned.

Just as the Otherworldly Demons were mankind’s nemeses, the opposite was true as well. The hatred for mankind flowed in the very bloodline of the Otherworldly Demons, making it nigh impossible for a human to command them.

Even an expert like Wu Yangzi would not necessarily be able to tame them, so how did a Perfect Harmonization realm cultivator like Zhang Xuan succeed?

Hearing Mu shi’s words, Zhang Xuan frowned.

The reason he had been able to make the Otherworldly Demon puppets obey his commands was due to Vicious, and exposing Vicious’ existence meant exposing the existence of the Book of Heaven’s Path and possibly his greatest secret, the Library of Heaven’s Path, as well.

Those were his greatest trump cards, so by no means should he ever reveal them!

“On top of that, this puppet was forged by having body parts forcefully switched while it was still alive. Judging by the marks, it seems like the Otherworldly Demons didn’t reject the swapping of the parts... or to be more exact, they were willing to have it done! Back then, the disappearance of Wu Yangzi caused a huge uproar, and there is even a report documenting it in the Qingyuan Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion.

“If Wu Yangzi possessed the ability to have the Otherworldly Demons obediently undergo his forging and listen to his commands at the end of it, he should have been more than capable of escaping from his captivity. If that was the case, he wouldn’t have been trapped in an underground chamber until his death,” Mu shi analyzed.

As a 7-star master teacher, as well as a 7-star blacksmith, Mu Shi was able to easily deduce the forging process of the Otherworldly Demon puppet. Even with Wu Yangzi's outstanding smithing capability, it would have been hard for him to successfully forge it had the Otherworldly Demon resisted.

Hearing Mu Shi's words, Lu Feng's eyes lit up. "Mu Shi is right. These might just be puppets, but their origin is dubious. On top of that, you clearly don't possess the strength to tame them!"

"Unless... you are royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, allowing you to command the Otherworldly Demons just by your bloodline itself. That would explain why the Otherworldly Demons would willingly allow themselves to be torn apart to be made into puppets, and why they would obey your commands even after death!"

Zhang Xuan's face darkened upon hearing those words.

Naturally, he wasn't royalty of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, but Vicious was, and he could very well be an emperor among them.

It was due to him exerting pressure on those Otherworldly Demons that Wu Yangzi had been able to forge them into puppets successfully.

But if he had to reveal the existence of Vicious, he would risk having to reveal the existence of the Library of Heaven's Path too.

"I have no idea how the Otherworldly Demons were forged into puppets either; that was Elder Wu Yangzi's doing. But as for the matter of taming them..."

After a moment of hesitation, Zhang Xuan said, "My teacher, fearing for my safety, tamed them and gave them to me."

"Your teacher?"

Lu Feng harrumphed coldly. "Which master teacher is that? I would like to know which formidable master teacher possesses the capability to make so many mindless Otherworldly Demon puppets obey the orders of a 4-star master teacher!"

“My teacher...” Zhang Xuan began to speak, but before he could finish his words, an impassive voice suddenly sounded from beyond the door.

“His teacher is me!”

The room was abruptly engulfed by a devastating aura.

844 I Am Yang Xuan!

That aura was reminiscent of a tsunami, leaving one feeling insignificant and helpless before it.

Everyone's hearts turned cold, and goosebumps rose from their arms. Even Mu shi's body had tensed in apprehension.

Before this aura, there was no one, not even a person as strong Mu shi, who dared to show the slightest bit of retaliation. Otherwise, they could very well be crushed by that overwhelming power in an instant.

Jiya! Jiya!

Under the crushing pressure of that devastating aura, the ancient Elder Hall came to the limits of its durability, and countless cracks began to surface throughout the room. Following which, with a long rumble, the room collapsed entirely.

To be able to dissipate the formations here and collapse the room just with the aura he exudes...

The school heads in the room exchanged fearful glances.

Not only was the Elder Hall made of incredibly resilient material, it was even reinforced with several extremely powerful formations. Even if a Saint 3-dan expert were to launch an attack with their full might against the room, they might not necessarily be able to destroy the formations.

Yet, a person actually managed to dissipate the formations and collapse the room with just his aura.

Just how powerful was Zhang Xuan's teacher to be able to do that?

With this thought in mind, they hurriedly raised their gazes and saw a blurred silhouette standing in the air above them. Amid the cloud of dust, they couldn't make out the other party's appearance clearly. Nevertheless, judging from his physique, the other party didn't seem too old, possibly only in

his early thirties, but he carried an authority that none dared to defy.

“Are you the ones who suspect my student of being an Otherworldly Demon?”

The figure harrumphed coldly. “Then... Do I look like an Otherworldly Demon to you?”

Boom!

His voice wasn't loud, but it created a sensation that felt as if the sky was crumbling down on them. Under that immense pressure, Lu Feng and the others felt their bodies stiffening, and even breathing became a difficulty.

Hong long long!

With the intensity of the pressure, the building beneath them also reached its limit and crumbled as well.

But that wasn't the end yet. The pressure that man exuded seemed to ripple outward like waves, and any building that came into the slightest contact with it would have the formations protecting it shattered immediately, and the majestic structure would come collapsing down as if nothing more than a fragile piece of paper.

“That is... the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall!”

Everyone hurriedly turned to look at the building that had just collapsed, and their eyelids began twitching uncontrollably.

That was the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, where the tablets of the predecessors and Kong shi's statue were housed!

That place was protected by the will of their predecessors, and even if all of them were to strike it with all their might simultaneously, it wouldn't suffer the slightest damage. Yet... with just mere words from the other party, it had collapsed!

“The fact that the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall has collapsed means that the wills of the predecessors dared not stand against this elder, and even... even Kong shi has fled!” an elder muttered in a daze.

Hearing those words, cold sweat began trickling down everyone's backs.

That elder was right.

The Teacher Acknowledgement Hall was protected by the will of Kong shi and many predecessors. Even the Otherworldly Demons would be doomed for failure if they were to attempt to breach those grounds. For it to collapse that easily with mere words, there was only one possibility... that elder's strength was so great that not even the will Kong shi had left behind dared to stand against him.

And for this to occur, it could only mean that either Kong shi himself had arrived at the scene or that the other party possessed strength worthy of Kong shi's respect.

But... how could that be possible?

Kong shi was no longer around, and considering the overwhelming strength Kong shi wielded, a person who possessed strength worthy of his respect would be...

Another elder's eyes narrowed as he muttered in a quivering voice, "Could he be an expert on par with the 72 Sages?"

The predecessors in the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall were all Saint realm experts at the very least, and not to mention, a sliver of Kong shi's will was infused within his statue as well. In terms of pure disposition, it was impossible for even a Saint realm 7-dan expert, 8-star master teacher, to send all of them fleeing with just mere words.

Only one who had achieved strength equivalent to the legendary direct disciples of Empyrean Kong shi, the 72 Sages, could possibly have the ability to do so.

Could the elder before them be an expert of such a caliber as well?

Was this for real?

In the time after Kong shi's disappearance, the strongest existences in the world had been the 72 Sages. However, the era of the 72 Sages hadn't lasted for long, so there were very few records of them in the world. After the 72 Sages departed,

there were quite a number of Saint realm pinnacle experts who rose to fill the power vacuum left in their absence, and those men founded the existing Sage Clans in the world.

Those old ancestors of the Sage Clans possessed power surpassing any mortal's imagination. Even a place like the Master Teacher Academy could be wiped off the map with a wave of their hand.

But nevertheless, those old ancestors were still a far way off from matching up to the strength of their predecessor, the 72 Sages!

Even if the other party isn't an expert of the same caliber as the 72 Sages, he is probably, at the very least, on par with the old ancestors of those Sage Clans...

With such a thought in mind, everyone subconsciously gulped.

A person who could make the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall collapse with just his disposition, there was only a single word that could be used to describe his strength: terrifying.

If an expert of that level truly intended to kill them, he need not even move his hands. Just a single thought, and they would be reduced to lifeless corpses in an instant. Furthermore, it would be difficult for even the Master Teacher Pavilion to trace such sudden and obscure deaths to him, which meant that there was nothing they could do to stop or deter him from doing what he liked.

"H-h-he is... so strong?" Mo Gaoyuan could feel his blood running cold.

He had met Zhang Xuan's teacher a while back, and they had even chatted with one another. However, as the other party had hidden his strength completely back then, he had thought that the other party was, at the very most, an 8-star master teacher.

But it turned out that... even that was an underestimation!

With mere words, the other party had turned all of the buildings within several hundred meters of the Elder Hall and Teacher Acknowledgement Hall into rubble. This was a feat beyond the capability of an 8-star master teacher!

With a pale face, Pavilion Master Mo furiously whispered to Elder Mo, “I already told you about how powerful Zhang shi’s teacher is. Didn’t you tell the other elders?”

It was due to his knowledge of how powerful Yang shi was that he had gone to such lengths to get along with Zhang Xuan, and he had discreetly informed Mo Zhu of the news back on Leiyuan Peak so that he could keep a lookout as well.

I gave you fair warning, but why are there still fools in your academy going on to judge the other party’s student on their own accord? Look, you have ended up incurring the wrath of a power far beyond you! Are you happy now?

For an expert of such caliber, even if he chose not to make a move personally out of sheer disdain, he could easily damn one to the bottom of hell with just a single word!

“I-I did tell them, but they refused to believe me!” Elder Mo replied tearfully.

He had never met Yang shi before, only hearing several rumors from Pavilion Master Mo, so his impression and fear of the man didn’t run as deep before. Thus, he had only brought it up casually before the others. Who in the world could have known that... the man would be a monster?

His strength was way off the charts!

“You all...”

Fearing that the man above might just destroy the entire Master Teacher Academy in a moment of anger, Mo Gaoyuan hurriedly raised his pale face and said, “Yang shi, I am Mo Gaoyuan; you offered me a pointer once before... It’s not our intention to make things difficult for Zhang shi. We only invited Zhang shi over to ask him a few questions...”

At this point, he had no choice but to speak up personally.

Otherwise, if he were to give that fool Lu Feng an opportunity to speak, they might really just end up breathing their last here.

The figure in the sky glanced downward and uttered coldly, “Oh? You only invited my student here to ask him a few questions? But why does it seem to me that you are judging

my student instead? Is it because you think that he is an Otherworldly Demon, or do you think that I am an Otherworldly Demon?”

An immense pressure that left one feeling as if the world before one was crumbling apart fell from the heavens, leaving the crowd below suffocated.

This is... a Celestial Master Teacher?

In an instant, the faces of everyone in the room paled even further, and the sheer fright they were experiencing rendered them incapable of words.

For as long as the world remembered, the only one known to be a Celestial Master Teacher had been Kong shi. But the inviolable authority reminiscent of a deity from the heavens that the figure above commanded... he was a Celestial Master Teacher as well. They had actually accused the student of a Celestial Master Teacher of being an Otherworldly Demon!

This was the most ludicrous thing anyone could do in the world!

Even the heavens had acknowledged him as a master teacher, so how could he possibly accept an Otherworldly Demon as his student?

Wasn't this a joke?

Gr-grandteacher?

Seeing the other party's face and feeling the familiar pressure crushing him, Mu shi finally recognized the man standing above him.

Zhang Xuan's teacher was no other than his grandteacher, whom he had met several days ago... Yang Xuan!

If he had known that Zhang Xuan was the other party's student, he would never have allowed this hearing to happen!

“W-we wouldn't dare...” Mo Gaoyuan's lips twitched uncontrollably as he hurriedly bowed deeply in deference.

“What about you?” Yang Xuan turned his cold gaze to Lu Feng.

“N-no, I dare not to!” Under that frosty gaze, Lu Feng couldn’t stop his body from trembling.

Had he known earlier that Zhang Xuan had such powerful backing, he would never have dared to initiate this mess... He had truly dug his own grave this time around!

It was all over. Having offended such a powerful master teacher, even if he were to survive this ordeal, his future was already over. There would be no one and nowhere that would dare accept him.

Beside him, Chen Chengxun and Dong Xin nearly keeled over.

They had thought that they would enjoy a life of glory once Lu Feng took over as the principal. They had never imagined such a situation would occur instead. It was as if the path to paradise had suddenly collapsed beneath their feet, damning them to the depths of hell.

“That had better be the case!” Yang Xuan harrumphed coldly as he raised his gaze, seemingly peering into the depths of the heavens.

“My name is Yang Xuan. If any of you feel that I have abused my power, feel free to report me to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters!”

“We wouldn’t dare do such a thing...” Mo Gaoyuan’s face immediately paled in fright.

Like hell they would report the other party!

On the contrary, if the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters were to learn that they had offended a master teacher of Yang shi’s stature, not only would they not redress their grievances, they might even get rid of them to appease Yang shi’s rage.

Master teachers of Yang shi’s caliber could be considered as the wealth of mankind. Putting aside a Master Teacher Academy of a Tier-1 Empire, not even an entire Conferred Empire could match up to them in value.

They would be counting their blessings if the happenings today never reached the ears of the headquarters; to report this

matter to the headquarters on their own accord... they would have to be tired of living to do so!

It was true that the Master Teacher Pavilion worked to uphold justice in the world, but it had to be practical as well, especially considering the existing threats it faced.

As such, the higher ranked a master teacher was, the more privileges they were granted. This served as motivation for master teachers to work harder, as well as a measure to preserve the forces of the Master Teacher Pavilion as far as possible.

Even the life of ten thousand 6-star master teacher couldn't match up to the value of an expert like the other party.

Which side the Master Teacher Pavilion would choose to take, it didn't take a genius to figure it out.

“That will be for the best,” Yang Xuan uttered impassively.

With a final glance at the crowd below, he flung his sleeve and turned around, preparing to leave.

At that moment, Mu shi suddenly rushed forward.

“Grandteacher!”

He had been practicing the cultivation method that his grandteacher had imparted to him over the past few days, and the affliction he had been suffering from had alleviated. For the first time in a very long time, he had experienced a growth in his cultivation. Thinking of the changes he had experienced over the past few days, he was filled with deep gratitude for the man before him.

Seeing that his benefactor was about to leave, Mu shi couldn't help but rush forward in agitation.

Yang Xuan took a glance at Mu shi and nodded slightly. “Un. Cultivate well, and perhaps, a day might come when you are able to return to the Mu Clan.”

After which, with a slight step, ‘hu!’, he abruptly disappeared from the spot, as if having teleported away.

“This is... Spatial Manipulation! He is... a 9-star master teacher?!”

After witnessing that scene, the crowd was completely dumbstruck.

Having grasped the laws of space, the most distinctive trait of 9-star master teachers was their ability to manipulate space, which allowed them to accomplish the unthinkable, such as constructing inner worlds through folding space... Given how Yang Shi had disappeared before their eyes in an instant, it could only mean that he had comprehended such laws as well!

A living 9-star master teacher...

There was barely a handful of them still in this world, and they had actually met one and even attempted to judge his student...

A shiver ran down everyone's spines as fear gripped their hearts.

It was fortunate that the other party, perhaps in view of his identity as a master teacher, had no intentions of getting even with them. Otherwise, they, along with the entire Master Teacher Academy, would have become a thing of the past.

Nevertheless, even though they were spared from this calamity, they would still do well not to push the other party's buttons anymore, which, in this case, was his student.

As such a thought came to their minds, they subconsciously turned their gazes to Zhang Xuan, only to see the latter with a deep frown on his forehead, seemingly displeased.

And the truth was that at this very instant, Zhang Xuan was indeed displeased.

While he knew that his clone wasn't a reliable person, he hadn't thought that the other party would be so unreliable.

This... Isn't this overdoing it?

845 I Nominate Zhang Xuan to Be the Principal

As he would have to expose the existence of the Library of Heaven's Path in order to explain how he managed to tame those Otherworldly Demonic puppets, Zhang Xuan had planned to have 'Yang Xuan' make an appearance to save the day.

Thus, through his mental connection with his clone, he had the latter appear in Yang Xuan's form.

Zhang Xuan had initially only intended to have Yang Xuan scare the others just a little, but who could have known that he would blow the entire matter way out of proportion?

Looking at the wreckage around him, Zhang Xuan slapped his forehead in frustration.

All his clone had needed to do was prove that he wasn't an Otherworldly Demon, but that fellow actually turned the Elder Hall, along with many other crucial buildings, into rubble...

As for how everything had happened...

The powerful aura, which his clone seemed to emanate, was from Vicious, naturally.

That fellow had once said that as long as he was given Kong shi's writings, he would be able to turn his aura that was drenched with killing intent like all other Otherworldly Demons into a purer and more orthodox form, similar to that of a master teacher.

The collapse of the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall was probably a result of the aura coming from Kong shi's writings. While Kong shi had yet to reach his peak when he left behind those words, there was no way that the will of any master teacher would dare to stand against him.

As for the aura of a Celestial Master Teacher, as his clone's soul had come from his, he had also been recognized by the

heavens. On top of that, Vicious was around to assist, so they managed to pull it off easily.

And the final disappearance was naturally not teleportation either. While the crowd had been distracted by their own fear, Zhang Xuan had managed to slip them into the Myriad Anthive Nest discreetly.

Entering a folded space was similar to entering another world. Even with the spiritual perception of a Saint 2-dan expert, it was impossible to find any traces of them anywhere, thus creating the illusion of teleportation.

It was fortunate that they had managed to pull it off perfectly, but considering the destruction left in their wake... wasn't this going too far?

Since this was only a small conflict, Zhang Xuan had intended to just erase all doubts of him being an Otherworldly Demon from the minds of the others, but this... He could see deep fear in the eyes on him!

Just as he was conflicted as to what he should do under such circumstances, Mu shi suddenly stepped forward, clasped his fist, and bowed.

“Senior Uncle!”

Zhang Xuan was slightly stunned for a moment before he responded with a slight nod. “There is no need to stand on ceremony!”

Since ‘Yang Xuan’ was his grandteacher, as the direct disciple of Yang Xuan, there was no mistake with Mu shi addressing him as such.

Senior Uncle? Lu Feng’s lips twitched, and he nearly fainted on the spot.

Mu shi was a 7-star master teacher, so in terms of seniority, Lu Feng could be considered to be a generation younger than the other party. If the other party was calling Zhang Xuan ‘Senior Uncle’... Didn’t that mean that his seniority before Zhang Xuan had dropped yet another generation, putting him on equal standing as the latter’s grandstudent?

It was just a moment ago that he had still been a junior...

Would the other party be calling him a child next?

What the heck was going on!

Not only did Lu Feng suffer a heavy blow from this, Dong Xin's vision had also darkened upon hearing those words.

Previously, Long Cangyue had said that going by the current trend, the next one of them to provoke Zhang Xuan could just end up as his great grandstudent...

Back then, she hadn't thought much of it, thinking that it was impossible. But this...

As a direct disciple of Lu Feng, if her teacher's seniority was that of Zhang Xuan's grandstudent, wouldn't that make her his great grandstudent?

Of the Great Four Student Factions in the Master Teacher Academy, Hu Yaoyao was the first to challenge Zhang Xuan, and she ended up becoming his apprentice.

Xue Zhenyang was the second, and he became his grandstudent.

And she, being the third... became his great grandstudent!

Tears wouldn't stop flowing down Dong Xin's cheeks. If she had known that this would happen, she would never have gotten involved in this trouble.... Now, she would have to call even Hu Yaoyao her grandteacher...

"This..." Pavilion Master Mo and the others were also at a loss after hearing Mu shi calling Zhang Xuan 'Senior Uncle'.

Paying no heed to the bizarre expressions of the crowd, Zhang Xuan asked Mu shi, "With this, there shouldn't be anyone who still suspects me of being an Otherworldly Demon, right?"

Mu shi hurriedly shook his head. "Of course not!"

You are Yang shi's student, and Yang shi is a Celestial Master Teacher. There is no way a student of a Celestial Master Teacher could be an Otherworldly Demon.

The other master teachers in the area also hastily agreed.

“Since this matter is cleared, this hearing should be over. I can take my leave now, right?” Zhang Xuan continued.

“Of course!” Mu shi nodded hurriedly.

“Alright, I will bid you all farewell now,” Zhang Xuan said.

Given the current state of affairs, even if he didn’t say a word, the Master Teacher Academy would still certainly make sure that Lu Feng was punished severely for his actions. As the most senior figure in the room, there was no need for him to lower his standing to deal with a mere grandstudent.

If he really insisted on dealing with Lu Feng, the prestige that he had just built up using his clone’s disguise would be diminished.

Furthermore, the reputation of the Master Teacher Academy was at stake here, so it wouldn’t be good for a student like him to get involved in the matter. It would be best to leave it to the school heads to deal with the matter as they deemed fit.

But just as Zhang Xuan was just about to leave, School Head Mo stepped forward and said, “Zhang shi, please wait a moment!”

“Is there still a problem?” Zhang Xuan asked politely.

School Head Mo had granted him plenty of help ever since his enrollment, so he had a high opinion of the latter.

Even in the hearing just a moment ago, before Yang shi made an appearance, he had been active in speaking up for him.

“It is like this... Mu shi once said that anyone who finds Senior Byzantium Helios will be made the next principal. Since you were the one who found Senior Byzantium Helios, and you have even become his master... I feel that it will only be right for you to take on the responsibility as the next principal of our academy!”

After saying those words, School Head Mo turned to look at the others and asked, “What do the rest of you think of this matter?”

Ever since the old principal disappeared, the academy had slowly become divided, and troubles had emerged one after

another. It was imperative that someone in the academy had to step up to take hold of the situation, and Zhang Xuan seemed to be the ideal candidate for that.

While he might be lacking in his cultivation, he made up for that through his deep comprehension in the other supporting occupations.

Besides, he had Senior Byzantium Helios as his tamed beast. With such powerful backing, who would dare question his authority?

“I was thinking of making the same suggestion!” Zhao Bingxu nodded in agreement.

“I have no qualms with Zhang shi becoming our next principal!” Wei Ranxue replied.

“I think that Zhang laoshi is the most suitable candidate to become the principal as well!” Jiang Qingqin nodded.

“I agree!” School Head Xu Changqing of the Martial Arts School hesitated for a moment before nodding.

Wang Ying and the others were guest elders of their school. If their teacher were to become the principal, they would surely be willing to devote more time to imparting knowledge to the student.

In just a few moments, half of the Ten Great Master Teachers had already expressed their support for the motion.

Senior Uncle is a student of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy himself, and he also fulfills most of the conditions required to become the principal. If he is willing to take on this responsibility, that will truly be a blessing for the academy!

Mu shi’s eyes lit up, and he nodded. “I agree to this motion as well!”

His main mission for coming to the Master Teacher Academy was to nominate and confirm the next principal.

While Senior Uncle might still be young, and his cultivation is still weak, he has a strong backer who is more than sufficient to make up for his deficiencies.

Besides, Senior Uncle is also an exceptional genius. Most likely, he will be able to rise up to the role in just a few years' time, and under his leadership, the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy could be brought to unprecedented greatness!

Mu shi turned his sights to the remaining five school heads. "What about the rest of you?"

"This..." Lu Feng and Chen Chengxun glanced at one another with extreme reluctance. They would have vetoed the motion immediately under normal circumstances, but considering their current plight and Zhang Xuan's newfound status...

"Since even Mu shi is in support of this matter, I have no objections either," the head of the Painter School said.

"I have no objections, too!" the head of the Celestial Designer School said.

"I am of the same opinion as the others!" Zhong Dingchun, the head of the Physician School, nodded.

Eventually, Lu Feng and Chen Chengxun had no choice but to relent as well. "Alright, we agree to the motion!"

They had no choice in this matter. With eight of the Ten Great Master Teachers in support of this motion, even if they were to voice their disagreements, nothing would change.

With all of the school heads in support of this motion, School Head Mo was just about to make the official declaration of the results when a deep, resounding voice suddenly sounded.

"One of the requirements to become the principal of the Master Teacher Academy is to be a 6-star master teacher. Zhang shi hasn't met this requirement yet. I disagree with this matter..." the Golden Origin Cauldron objected.

As the Guardian Saint Artifact of the Master Teacher Academy, its position was higher than even that of the school heads. Naturally, it had a say in the matter as well.

"Senior Golden Origin Cauldron, even though Zhang shi isn't a 6-star master teacher yet, given his astounding talent, it won't be long before he successfully clears the examination," School Head Mo said.

The others nodded in agreement at School Head Mo's words.

They had witnessed the heaven-defying talent of that young man personally, and the copious destruction all over the Master Teacher Academy served as testimony to that. If even a genius like him couldn't pass the 6-star master teacher examination, who else could?

"You may be right, but have you all forgotten about the selection in three months' time?" the Golden Origin Cauldron asked.

"Three months' time?" The crowd frowned, unsure of what the Golden Origin Cauldron was referring to.

"It seems like all of you have really forgotten about it... Three months from now will be the centennial 'Combat Master Selection'!" the Golden Origin Cauldron exclaimed.

"Combat Master Selection? Now that you mention it... it has indeed been a hundred years since the previous selection!"

"The Qingyuan Conferred Empire's Combat Master Hall only conducts a selection exercise once every hundred years. I wasn't a school head yet during the previous selection, so I don't really recall it..."

"The four great academies under Qingyuan Conferred Academy will be gathering together for the selection. It will be a huge event!"

"I had forgotten about that as well... If Zhang Shi fails to become a 6-star master teacher within the next three months, we won't stand a chance against the other three academies!"

...

Everyone fell silent.

"Combat Master Selection?" Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

He didn't think that he would remain in Hongyuan Empire for too long, so it didn't matter to him whether he became the principal of the Master Teacher Academy or not. However, judging from everyone's tone, it seemed like they had some apprehensions regarding the Combat Master Selection.

“I believe Zhang shi should have heard of combat masters before?” School Head Mo asked.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

The Combat Master Hall could be considered an offshoot of the Master Teacher Pavilion, serving primarily as its offensive wing.

Combat masters were considered master teachers as well, but they need not be skilled in teaching nor did they have to take on supporting occupations. All that was required of them was to be sufficiently strong to clear the respective examinations to obtain their master teacher rank.

Each combat master was known to possess the capability of fighting with opponents with higher cultivation levels than them. Even among the powerful master teachers, they could be considered experts.

Back then, when he was in Huanyu Empire, he had once been suspected of being a combat master on one occasion.

“The master teachers of the Combat Master Hall are famed for their overwhelming strength, and most regard it as an honor to join their ranks,” School Head Mo explained.

“Once every century, the Combat Master Hall will select fresh blood from the various academies to fill their ranks, and the next selection happens to be in three months’ time!”

“Three months...”

“That’s right. In three months’ time, the four academies will gather together for the selection. However, due to the limited slots... the principals of the four academies will be first competing in a duel to decide on the allocation of slots to each academy first!”

School Head Mo said awkwardly, “If Zhang shi becomes the principal, you will have to participate in the principals’ duel. Given your current strength... I fear that you might not be able to hold your ground against the others!”

As principals of Master Teacher Academies, the opponents Zhang Xuan might face would be 6-star pinnacle or even 7-

star master teachers.

Given Zhang shi's talent, there was no doubt that he could surpass the other principals if given sufficient time... but the duel was in three months' time!

"I see!" Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

It was no wonder everyone was worried. He was currently only at Ethereal Treading realm primary stage, which would put him at a fatal disadvantage against the other principals.

"Actually, there is no need to worry. If I am not mistaken, Zhang laoshi already has five supporting occupations at 6-star rank. As long as he earns one more, he will have cleared the supporting occupation prerequisite for the 6-star master teacher examination. I think it is possible to make it within three months!" Jiang Qingqin interjected.

Currently, the 6-star supporting occupations that Zhang shi had were blacksmith, physician, apothecary, terpsichore, and demonic tunist.

He was still lacking another one to clear the supporting occupation prerequisite for the 6-star master teacher examination. Given the ridiculous rate which he learned at... getting another supporting occupation up to 6-star within three months shouldn't be a problem!

846 Principal Zhang

After all, Jiang Qingqin had personally witnessed the rate at which Zhang Xuan learned.

He had still been completely ignorant the first day, but the following day, his capability as a demonic tunist abruptly soared to 7-star. Considering that, it shouldn't take him too long to master another supporting occupation.

“I am not worried about his supporting occupations but his cultivation. Zhang shi is currently only at Perfect Harmonization realm, but the minimum requirement to take the 6-star examination is to reach Chrysalis realm pinnacle,” Zhao Bingxu said.

5-star low-tier, high-tier, and pinnacle corresponded to Cosmos Bridge realm, Perfect Harmonization realm, and Ethereal Treading realm.

In order to take the 6-star master teacher examination, one's cultivation had to be Chrysalis realm pinnacle at the minimum.

Back then, when Zhang shi clashed with You Xu, he had exposed his strength—Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle. It was impressive for a freshman, but he was still two realms away from becoming a 6-star master teacher. To progress through two realms within three months... One could say that it was nearly impossible.

“Ah... Actually, when I went out a few days ago, I accidentally made a breakthrough, so my cultivation is currently at Ethereal Treading realm...” Zhang Xuan said.

“Accidentally?” Everyone widened their eyes in shock.

Others had to put in a huge amount of effort while expending many valuable treasures in order to reach Ethereal Treading realm, and yet, you claim that you reached it accidentally? On top of that, you still dare to say it as if you have been wronged...

Can you be more serious? This is an important matter we are speaking of!

In truth, they had wronged Zhang Xuan. It was indeed true that he had made the breakthrough unintentionally, and he was frustrated by the matter.

“You made the breakthrough to Ethereal Treading realm?”

But different from the frustrated and stifled expressions of the others, School Head Mo froze, and his mouth suddenly began twitching. “When Zhang shi first participated in the entrance examination, I remember that his cultivation was only at Consonant Spirit realm pinnacle. It was to save a group of students that he made the breakthrough to Cosmos Bridge realm in the midst of the examination...”

As the invigilator, he had kept tabs on the happenings of the examination so as to source out talented students which the academy could devote resources to grooming. According to what he'd heard, Zhang Xuan had forcefully raised his cultivation by an entire realm just so to save his fellow peers from the encirclement they were in.

He had lamented after hearing the news as such forceful and abrupt breakthroughs tended to leave hidden traumas within one's body, limiting one's future progress. This was also why he had advised Zhang Xuan to take note of this matter and make sure to stabilize his cultivation well... But before he knew it, the other party was suddenly at Ethereal Treading realm...

“It has been less than twenty days since the entrance examination, right?” someone amid the crowd muttered.

Everyone hurriedly turned their gazes to the young man in horror, as if they were staring at a monster.

To advance from Transcendent Mortal 5-dan Consonant Spirit realm to 8-dan Ethereal Treading realm in slightly more than half a month...

That was nearly three whole realms!

Are you sure you aren't some renowned expert concealing your cultivation to toy with us?

Even Cultivation Impartation couldn't possibly be as fast as that, right?

Don't you need to reinforce your cultivation?

Don't you need to spend some time digesting and musing over the intricacies of each cultivation realm?

Just as they were feeling frenzied over the matter, they suddenly heard Zhang Xuan sighing deeply, and with an embarrassed look, he said, "Indeed. I have been spending so much time advancing my supporting occupations that I wasn't able to find much time to cultivate, so my progress has been slow..."

In truth, he had been intending to sweep through the ten schools within ten days and spend an additional six more striving for Saint realm 1-dan, thus graduating within half a month.

But more than half a month had passed, and he was only at Ethereal Treading realm primary stage. Additionally, he had only mastered five supporting occupations as well... He was embarrassed by his incapability.

Hearing those words, the crowd nearly spurted blood.

The heck!

You call this slow?

If your pace is considered slow, then what do you call spending several decades just to raise our cultivation by one stage?

Also, wipe that embarrassment off your face!

The ones who should be embarrassed are us!

What made things worse was that despite the ridiculousness of Zhang Xuan's words, they could tell that he wasn't lying, deepening the trauma they had just suffered.

Ever since the other party enrolled in the academy, he had spent seven days to master five supporting occupations, achieving proficiency levels surpassing even those of the

heads of the respective schools, causing pandemonium in his wake...

Not only so, he even had the time to conduct lectures and establish the influential Xuanxuan Faction. Despite all he had done, he was still able to find time to make the breakthrough from Cosmos Bridge realm pinnacle to Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle...

If he had devoted his time to just cultivating in itself...

Forget it, let's not think about it anymore! It will only make us feel worse anyway!

In comparison to the other party, their rate of cultivation was indeed not only slow. It was as if they suffered from a complete lack of talent!

As stifled as they were, recalling the unfathomable expert the other party had as a teacher, they could only accept what was before them.

Incredible talent paired with an unparalleled teacher. If the other party were to be on the same level as them, that would be truly embarrassing. He would be unworthy of his title as a genius!

After a long moment of silence, one of the elders spoke up. "Given Zhang Shi's capability, reaching 6-star within three months shouldn't be a problem for him!"

"I think so, too." Words of agreement soon rippled through the group.

Three months wasn't a long time for a cultivator; it would be gone in one period of seclusion. But to the fellow before them, they dared not think what he could achieve within this limited period of time.

Perhaps, he might even be able to make the breakthrough to Saint realm!

"Then... since we have come to a consensus, let's not hesitate any longer. We shall conduct the inauguration ceremony in three days then!" Mu Shi declared with a wave of his hand.

The inauguration of the principal of the Master Teacher Academy was a huge affair with great implications for the surrounding Tier-1 Empires and Master Teacher Pavilions.

The reason it was set for three days later was to allow for sufficient preparation time for the ceremony and to invite the guests.

Besides, they had to fix the Elder Hall and the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall first. Otherwise, if others were to see the tattered state the great Master Teacher Academy had been reduced to, they would probably laugh themselves to death.

Having decided on the matter, the others quickly nodded in agreement.

While the Golden Origin Cauldron did have a vote in the matter as well, given that even Mu Shi had expressed his support for Zhang Xuan, it had no choice but to go along with the majority decision as well.

In any case, its standing wouldn't change regardless of who became the principal, so there was no need for it to go all out to oppose Zhang Xuan either.

Seeing how the group had come to a decision without him, Zhang Xuan's eyelids twitched uncontrollably.

In your discussion, deciding whether I should be the principal or not, shouldn't you have asked for my opinion as well?

Perhaps noticing Zhang Xuan's thoughts, the Byzantium Helios Beast said, "Master, becoming the principal might be a heavy responsibility, but it comes with many privileges as well. For one, you can access the facilities of the school—the libraries and such—freely!"

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

If he could gain access to all of the books in the academy freely, becoming the new principal was indeed nothing much.

After the confirmation of this matter, the group discussed, for another two hours, how best to allocate the various responsibilities for the preparations of the inauguration ceremony.

Nearing the end of the meeting, School Head Mo turned to Zhang Xuan and said apologetically, “Zhang shi, until the inauguration ceremony is over, we can’t bring you into the principal’s residence. Thus, we will have to ask you to remain in your manor for a while longer...”

Even though this matter was already approved by the Ten Great Master Teachers and Mu shi, Zhang Xuan still couldn’t be considered the official principal until the inauguration ceremony was over. Thus, he couldn’t use most of the authority he had as the principal just yet.

Understanding this, Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

In any case, it was just three days. It would pass in a flash.

In the discussion, it was decided that Zhang Xuan should focus his attention on raising his cultivation and clearing the 6-star master teacher examination, so most of the responsibilities of the principal would be distributed among the Ten Great Master Teachers for the time being.

Naturally, upon hearing those words, Zhang Xuan heaved a huge sigh of relief.

At that point, he suddenly recalled another matter he had to tend to, so he asked, “I need to forge a grade-7 pill, so may I borrow Senior Golden Origin Cauldron for a moment?”

It had been ten days since he had left Hongyuan City, and while he hadn’t had the time to check on Wei Ruyan yet, her soul should have been sufficiently nourished at this point. It was about time for him to move on to the next step.

Thus, the urgent matter at hand was to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill.

The various medicinal herbs should have been gathered by now, and Apothecary Lu and the others should have achieved a certain level of mastery in the forging technique he had imparted to them. What he was lacking now was a proper cauldron to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill in.

“Cough cough...” His face flushed with anxiety, Zhao Bingxu hurriedly explained, “Zhang shi, Senior Golden Origin Cauldron is a weapon caldron, not a pill cauldron!”

It went without saying that there was a huge difference between a weapon cauldron and a pill cauldron.

As a 6-star blacksmith and apothecary, Zhang Shi should have been more than able to tell the difference!

Why would he make such a bizarre request out of the blue?

“I understand, but the medicinal energy contained within a grade-7 pill is so great that I fear that Spirit-tier cauldrons will be unable to harness it. Most probably, only a Saint cauldron like Senior Golden Origin Cauldron will be able to do so,” Zhang Xuan said.

Zhang Xuan was confident that Apothecary Lu and the others would be able to successfully forge the Grand Intermittence Pill if they were to follow his procedures strictly without incurring a cauldron explosion, but after his previous few experiences in pill forging, he understood that things wouldn't necessarily go as planned regardless of how thorough the preparations were.

If a Spirit-tier cauldron was used and it failed to confine the explosion, the entire Master Teacher Academy could possibly be reduced to rubble.

This was a risk he couldn't afford to take.

“This...”

Zhao Bingxu was perplexed. “There is a huge difference between a pill cauldron and a weapon cauldron. How are you going to forge a pill in him?”

“There's no need to worry. Even though Senior Golden Origin Cauldron is a weapon cauldron, he is still ultimately a cauldron. As long as I place a formation over him to alter his properties slightly, he will work fine as a pill cauldron as well,” Zhang Xuan replied with a smile.

The main difference between a pill cauldron and a weapon cauldron lay in their temperature.

Weapon cauldrons were far better at retaining heat, thus allowing the temperature to rise to higher levels.

On the other hand, pill cauldrons could heat up and cool down swiftly, making it easier to manipulate the temperature.

Fortunately, this problem could be easily solved by implementing a formation on top of the cauldron, so it wasn't a huge issue.

Hearing that Zhang Xuan could alter the properties of a weapon cauldron into that of a pill cauldron with a formation, Zhao Bingxu hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"If you are confident, I will talk to Senior Golden Origin Cauldron on your behalf..."

However, at that moment, the Golden Origin Cauldron suddenly harrumphed. "I am a Saint weapon cauldron, and you expect me to forge a pill for you? Dream on!"

As a Saint artifact, it had its own pride. To it, making it forge a pill was like forcing a duck to lay chicken eggs, and it viewed it as a huge insult. How could it possibly agree to that?

Hearing those words, Zhao Bingxu clasped his fist and pleaded, "Senior..."

"Don't waste your breath, it's not like you are unaware of my temper. If you say another word, I shall swallow you and turn you into cinders!" the Golden Origin Cauldron bellowed with unconcealable pride in its tone.

"This..."

Hearing the obstinate tone of the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhao Bingxu could only sigh deeply and shake his head helplessly. "Zhang shi, this... I'm afraid that I won't be able to help you on this. If Senior Golden Origin Cauldron refuses to help you, there is no way we can force him to help you."

If the spirit within a Saint artifact refused to cooperate, it would be impossible to use the artifact. If the Golden Origin Cauldron were to tamper with the forging process even in the slightest, the medicinal herbs could be easily turn to ash, resulting in a tragic failure.

"Let me try to negotiate with him myself!" Zhang Xuan told Zhao Bingxu telepathically before walking up to the Golden

Origin Cauldron.

It must be said that the Saint artifact was indeed massive, standing half a head taller than Zhang Xuan. It emanated a domineering aura that exerted immense pressure on those standing before it.

As expected of the Guardian Saint Artifact of the Master Teacher Academy, it indeed possessed fearsome prowess.

Even the Byzantium Helios Beast, despite its breakthrough, was no match for the other party.

The Golden Origin Cauldron harrumphed coldly. “You want me to forge pills for you? That is impossible, so you’d better kick that idea out of your mind. Otherwise, even if they have all nominated you to be the next principal, I will still reduce you to cinders.”

“Senior, hold it for a moment. It won’t be too late for you to make your decision after hearing my offer!” Zhang Xuan smiled confidently.

After which, he stepped closer and placed his palm lightly on the Golden Origin Cauldron. Following which, he circled around the Golden Origin Cauldron, smacking his palm on it intermittently as he walked by.

“Do you think that... Zhang shi will be able to tame Senior Golden Origin Cauldron?” School Head Mo asked School Head Zhao discreetly as he gazed at the sight before him.

Zhao Bingxu shook his head. “I think it will be difficult. It’s not like you don’t know Senior Golden Origin Cauldron’s temper. He even snubbed the old principal back then, so I don’t think Zhang shi will fare any better with him. To persuade him... unlikely. Truly unlikely!”

“I think so too...” School Head Mo sighed.

Just as he was about to continue speaking, a sharp sound suddenly echoed from the Golden Origin Cauldron, and its massive body jolted abruptly.

The next moment, it cuddled up to Zhang Xuan, as if a lapdog trying to please its owner, “Ding Ding pays respect to master!”

Master, I will forge whatever you want me to! Isn't it just pills? How many do you need?"

"..." School Head Mo.

"..." School Head Zhao.

"..." The others. Ding Ding literally means Cauldron Cauldron. I think it sounds better in hanyupinyin because it resembles the sound when one strikes a cauldron, though the resonance should be slightly deeper than that. It is the same character as the unit of strength used in the novel too, ding, and that refers to the weight of a cauldron, standardized to be 1000kg (9810N) in the novel.

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The Golden Origin Cauldron was a real Saint artifact, the guardian of the Master Teacher Academy. It was an extremely prideful existence, such that even though the preceding principals had the right to mobilize it in extreme situations, none had succeeded in taming it before.

Even the previous principal, despite having made a breakthrough to 7-star before he went missing, had been unable to make it submit to him.

To make things worse, the Golden Origin Cauldron was also extremely lazy. It preferred to spend its time dozing lazily, so nearly no one had been able to convince it to allow them to smith a weapon using it.

Yet, Zhang Xuan was asking it to forge a pill... Everyone thought that he would be disappointed, but who knew that such a godly twist was waiting for them!

Not to mention, what the heck is Ding Ding...

Ding your head!

You are a Saint artifact, the guardian of the Master Teacher Academy... Where is your pride and dignity?

On the other hand, Lu Feng felt as if he was going insane as well.

When he invited the Golden Origin Cauldron to the conference earlier on, it had acted extremely arrogantly, even threatening to reduce him to cinders. Yet, at this very moment, it was cooing up to Zhang Xuan in an attempt to fawn over him, as if fearing that the latter wouldn't allow it to help him...

How could there be such a huge difference in treatment even though they were both humans?

Having tamed the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to the crowd and smiled. "Done!"

Even though the Golden Origin Cauldron was a Saint artifact, it still had its fair share of flaws. Using the Library of Heaven's Path, Zhang Xuan had been able to find them easily, and he had corrected some of them on the spot. After building up his credibility, he had given his word to the other party that he would help it raise its tier.

With such an alluring offer placed before it, it was inevitable that the Golden Origin Cauldron would jump at it.

After a long moment of speechlessness, Zhao Bingxu could only raise his thumb and compliment him. "Incredible, my principal!"

It was impossible not to be impressed by him. Zhang Shi had always managed to exceed their expectations each and every time. Under his lead, the academy just might reach unprecedented heights, perhaps even surpassing the other three to become the top Master Teacher Academy under Qingyuan Empire.

"Master, that fellow has gone to great lengths to do you in. Shall I reduce him to cinders for you?"

After pledging allegiance to Zhang Xuan, it immediately began thinking on his behalf as well. With an aura dripping with savagery, it glared at Lu Feng ferociously, seemingly threatening to devour him whole.

It had seen how the other party had gleefully tried to bring his master down. His master, as a grandteacher-like figure to the other party, could overlook his grandstudent's mistake, but as his master's loyal artifact, it couldn't do the same.

Hearing those words, Lu Feng's face immediately paled in fright. "Senior..."

Famed as the Master Teacher Academy's Guardian Saint Artifact, the Golden Origin Cauldron's standing could be considered equivalent to an old ancestor of the Master Teacher Academy. Even if it were to really reduce him to cinders, considering that this was an internal affair of the Master Teacher Academy, not even Mu Shi would be in a good position to speak up on his behalf.

“Who are you calling senior? Call me your grandfather!” the Golden Origin Cauldron sneered coldly.

“I...” On the verge of tears, Lu Feng turned to Mu shi desperately to plead with him for help.

However, Mu shi shook his head and said, “Senior Golden Origin Cauldron is right. You framed an innocent master teacher and nearly ruined his reputation. I will report this matter to the headquarters as I have seen it. Not only will you lose your position as the head of the Apothecary School, there is a good chance that your master teacher license will be revoked as well!”

“My master teacher license will be revoked?” Lu Feng muttered in utter shock as he suddenly felt a surge of weakness through his body, and his knees fell to the ground.

He had known that this matter would result in the loss of his position as the head of the Apothecary School, but if he were to be stripped of his master teacher license as well, he would have lost everything that he had worked hard for over the past few centuries.

Seeing Lu Feng’s defeated state, Mu shi sighed pensively. “As the role model of mankind, master teachers must remain upright at all times. You allowed your own emotions to get in the way of your judgement, leaping at an opportunity to frame a fellow master teacher without conducting prudent investigation beforehand. This is already against the moral code that we, as teachers, have to observe. I can’t help you with this matter. You only have yourself to blame for your plight.”

If he had really listened to Lu Feng’s words and punished Zhang shi without giving him a chance to explain himself, he would have truly erred greatly.

A person like Lu Feng was like a black sheep among the master teachers. In order to maintain a righteous culture within the Master Teacher Pavilion, he would have to be expelled.

“I understand...” Lu Feng replied weakly.

Two hours ago, he had still been the influential stand-in principal of the Master Teacher Academy, a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, and a Half-Spiritual Perception realm expert. Alas, he had fallen from grace, and the authoritative disposition that he commanded before had withered into helplessness.

In this battle against Zhang Xuan, he had suffered a complete defeat.

After dealing with Lu Feng, Mu shi turned his sights to Chen Chengxun.

“Chen Chengxun, for blindly listening to the words of another, failing to discern right from wrong, you will be stripped of your responsibility as the head of the Formation Master School, and you are to await the verdict from the headquarters!”

While School Head Chen might not have played a huge role in this incident, he was still a culprit who had played a part in framing Zhang shi.

“I understand.”

In that instant, Chen Chengxun seemed as if he had aged a decade.

“As for Dong Xin, as a student of the Master Teacher Academy, instead of working hard on your studies and acting as a role model for the freshmen, you got involved in the politics of the academy and became a tool for Lu Feng to frame Zhang shi. From today onward, you will be stripped of your position as a student... In other words, you are expelled from the academy!” Mu shi waved his hands.

With the accusations against Zhang Xuan proving to be unfounded, and that he was going to be the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy, those who had attempted to do him in had to be dealt with. Otherwise, if they were to set a precedent for leniency in such a matter, it might encourage others to do the same.

Furthermore, the authority and standing of the principal could not be sullied by just anyone.

While Dong Xin had said that she was just recounting what she had seen, it was due to her words that Lu Feng and Chen Chengxun had put the plan into motion. The words of a master teacher held great power, so it was imperative that they should be held accountable for their words. It was an unfortunate mistake, but it was a fact that she had unwittingly become Lu Feng's accomplice as well, so she had to be promptly punished, too.

With a darkened complexion, Dong Xin clasped her fist and bowed. "Yes!"

She had thought that having found a handle on Zhang Xuan, she could finally get one over him. But not only had she become of the same seniority as the other party's great grandstudent, she was even expelled from the academy...

While she was still a 6-star master teacher after leaving the academy, the connections she had built up in the academy over many years had gone to waste. On top of that, there was also a blemish on her record, making it difficult for her to advance further as a master teacher.

Of the four of us, it seems Hu Yaoyao is the wisest after all! Dong Xin sighed deeply.

Their four student factions had been competing with one another for several years, and thinking about the matter, it seemed like Hu Yaoyao was the one with the most foresight of the four leaders. As Zhang Shi's apprentice, it would mean that she was a direct subordinate of the academy's principal...

With such an identity, her prestige would skyrocket, and many would be eager to fawn over her, making it easier than ever for her to obtain resources and forge connections.

After dealing with the trio, Mu Shi turned to Zhang Xuan and asked, "Principal Zhang, is this resolution fine with you?"

Even though Mu Shi was a 7-star master teacher, Zhang Xuan was currently the principal of the academy. By addressing Zhang Xuan as Principal Zhang and consulting him on this matter, he was expressing his respect for the other party's authority, as well as to clear away any doubts that he might be siding with Lu Feng and the others.

“Yes, the resolution is fine with me.” Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Actually, in his view, as long as the trio were willing to contribute all of their spirit stones to him, he didn't mind dropping the matter altogether. In any case, those three were unlikely to be able to start anything anymore. Yet, not only were they removed from their current positions, some of them might even lose their master teacher license... What complaints could Zhang Xuan have of this?

“I still have matters to tend to, so I will be returning now... Ding Ding, let's go!” Leaving those words behind, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and stored the Golden Origin Cauldron in his storage ring as he bade the others farewell.

After returning to his manor, he had Sun Qiang head to the Xuanxuan Faction headquarters to invite Apothecary Lu and the others over before making his way to the Apothecary School.

Back then, he had communicated with the headquarters, and the other party had said that they would bring the Grand Intermittence Grass over.

Walking through the Apothecary School, he soon reached the reception of the Apothecary Pavilion and found that the medicinal herb the headquarters had promised him had arrived several days earlier.

It was said that the man who delivered the medicinal herb had wanted to hand it over to him personally, but after waiting a day in futility, he could only leave in disappointment.

Having obtained the Grand Intermittence Grass, Zhang Xuan was just about to return to his manor to check up on Wei Ruyan's condition when he suddenly saw Luo Qiqi walking toward him.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Luo Qiqi's eyes lit up. “Teacher, you're back!”

“Zhang shi!”

There were several others standing behind Luo Qiqi. They were Yu Fei-er, Xing Yuan, Wu Zhen, and Ye Qian.

Just like Luo Qiqi, they had all achieved a breakthrough in their cultivation, reaching the Perfect Harmonization realm.

It seemed like Zhao Bingxu's Meridian and Bone Cleansing was indeed extremely useful to them. In just a single period of seclusion, they had already made significant advancements in their cultivation.

"Not bad!" Zhang Xuan remarked with a smile.

Even though he had a conflict with the others previously, the experience they had shared in the underground chamber had forged a unique bond among them. Thus, he truly felt happy for them from the depths of his heart when he saw them achieving greater heights.

"Zhang Xuan, I told you that I will repay my debt to you. Here are three high-tier spirit stones, treat the remaining as extra compensation for that day!" Yu Fei-er stepped forward and handed him a jade box. Three high-tier spirit stones were lined up within it, and they harnessed such great energy within them that even the spiritual energy in the surroundings was disturbed.

She had gambled with Zhang Xuan on multiple occasions, but not once did a bet end in her victory, and she even became the other party's maid... though thinking about it now, she had never really fulfilled her 'responsibilities' as a maid.

Nevertheless, as a princess of Hongyuan Empire, and considering the fact that she had just made a breakthrough to the Perfect Harmonization realm, it wasn't too difficult for her to ask for a couple of high-tier spirit stones from the royal court.

"I won't stand on ceremony then..." If there was one thing Zhang Xuan always needed, it was spirit stones. With a flick of his wrist, he placed the jade box into his storage ring.

"Zhang shi, we have heard of your encounter in the academy. Did the school heads... make things difficult for you?" Xing Yuan and Wu Zhen asked anxiously.

From the moment they came out from their seclusion, they had been hearing about Zhang shi's affairs in the academy, how he

crippled several schools and even challenged a vice school head to a Life-and-Death Physician Duel... It could be said that in just the half of month since Zhang Shi's enrollment, the ruckus he had caused in the academy was greater than what the four of them had caused over the past few years.

Seeing that the others were sincerely worried for him, Zhang Xuan replied with a smile, "They didn't. Don't worry, I'm fine."

"That's good!" Hearing those words, the group heaved a sigh of relief.

At this point, Yu Fei-er stepped forward, and gritting her teeth, she hesitated for a brief moment before saying, "My father hopes to meet you."

"Your father? That is... the emperor of Hongyuan Empire?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Since Yu Fei-er was the Sixth Princess of Hongyuan Empire, naturally, her father must be the incumbent emperor.

"That's right." Yu Fei-er nodded.

"When?" Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

"He has asked me to invite you to the banquet tonight," Yu Fei-er replied.

"Why would he invite me to a banquet?" Zhang Xuan was puzzled.

He was only a 4-star master teacher. He might have caused quite a ruckus in the academy, but surely what he had done wasn't sufficient for the emperor of a Tier-1 Empire to extend an invitation to him?

"King Huai has gifted you a luxurious manor, and you once took me in as your maid as well. On top of that, you caused quite a huge ruckus in the academy and emptied out nearly the entire Spirit Emporium... Naturally, my father hopes to meet the mastermind behind all of that!" Yu Fei-er said.

At Zhang Xuan's current pace, it seemed as if he would tear apart the capital next. If Yu Fei-er's father hadn't heard of him

after everything that he had done, he would truly be an incompetent emperor.

Not to mention, he had taken the other party's daughter as his maid at one point in time. Even though Yu Fei-er didn't mention it to him, he still had his sources to uncover that.

"This..." Zhang Xuan scratched his head awkwardly.

"Alright then. However, I need to forge a pill first. If I have time, I will make sure to drop by..."

Since he was staying in Hongyuan Empire for the time being, it would be impossible for him to steer completely clear of Yu Fei-er's father way, especially if the other party was intent on meeting him. Besides, there was nothing for him to fear either.

"It's settled then. I will meet you at the banquet. The location is the royal palace, and here is your invitation letter!" Seeing that she had received Zhang Xuan's agreement, Yu Fei-er passed a letter over with a smile.

"Un." Zhang Xuan took the letter and stowed it in his storage ring.

After bidding farewell to Yu Fei-er, Luo Qiqi, and the others, Zhang Xuan returned to his manor. However, as soon as he stepped through the door, Sun Qiang suddenly rushed up to him with an anxious look on his face.

"Young Master, bad news... the Ten-leafed Flower you have planted in the courtyard... has changed colors!"

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“The color changed?” Taken aback, Zhang Xuan hurriedly made his way over the area where the Ten-leafed Flower was planted.

The Ten-leafed Flower was a saint herb. Upon reaching maturity, a different colored flower would bloom on each of its ten leaves, and each flower corresponded to a human's three hun and seven po.[1]

Wei Ruyan's soul had been placed into it to be nourished.

Based on what his deduction, the color of the Ten-leafed Flower shouldn't change in the midst of the treatment, so what could be happening?

Soon, at the center of the courtyard, Zhang Xuan saw the Ten-leafed Flower. Its previously resplendent flowers had all turned pitch black, as if someone had tossed a bucket of ink over it.

“What happened?” Zhang Xuan's face darkened.

The ten colors of the Ten-leafed Flower were symbolic of its ability to nurture a soul. For them to have turned black, it was clear that some kind of mishap must have happened.

He had already promised the deceased Wei Changfeng to take good care of his daughter, so nothing could be allowed to happen to Wei Ruyan!

“Young Master, you told me take care of this flower, so I have been diligently watering it with some Earth Vein Spirit Essence every day. It had been growing well, and even when I checked it this morning before you returned, I didn't notice any anomalies. However, just two hours ago, the colors of its flowers suddenly turned pitch-black. I checked the surroundings carefully, but there were no signs of anyone coming by and tampering with it. I have no idea what happened,” Sun Qiang explained anxiously.

“It suddenly turned pitch-black?” Zhang Xuan muttered with a frown.

He released the surrounding formation and studied the surroundings carefully, and indeed, just as Sun Qiang said, it didn't seem like anyone else had been there.

Since no one else had been there, Sun Qiang would have been the greatest suspect. However, Sun Qiang had been with him for some time now, and he trusted the other party deeply. Furthermore, Sun Qiang had no reason to harm Wei Ruyan. Just what could have happened?

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan walked up to the Ten-leafed Flower and studied it carefully with his Eye of Insight.

Previously nourished by the Earth Vein Spirit Essence and Heaven's Path zhenqi, the Ten-leafed Flower had been overflowing with vitality when he left Hongyuan City ten days ago. But in this instant, not only had the resplendent flowers turned black, even the leaves seemed to have become slightly withered, as if they were suffering from some kind of terminal illness that was sapping its life force away.

This feeling was particularly prominent when Zhang Xuan saw the decay on the exposed rhizome of the herb.

How could this have happened?

Under the constant nourishment of the dense spiritual energy from the Spirit Gathering Formation and the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, the saint herb should have flourished with time. How could it have been reduced to this state instead?

Zhang Xuan stretched his hand over to touch the Ten-leafed Flower and muttered “Flaws!” beneath his breath. The next moment, a book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path, and he hurriedly flipped it open.

Upon taking a look, his complexion turned awful. It was indeed poisoned!

According to the details recorded in the Library of Heaven's Path, the reason the Ten-leafed Flower had been reduced to its current state was because it had been poisoned!

Wei Ruyan possesses the Poison Soul Constitution, which means that her soul contains lethal poison. The Ten-leafed Flower has the ability to nurture a soul, but after prolonged contact with her soul, it was inevitable that it would be poisoned. If not for the dense spiritual energy and the Earth Vein Spirit Essence nourishing it and sustaining its life force, it would have died several days ago...

A deep frown surfaced on Zhang Xuan's face as he analyzed the situation.

Wei Ruyan's Poison Soul Constitution was simply a formidable ability. The fact that it could suppress even the Innate Fetal Poison in his soul served as proof of its prowess!

The Ten-leafed Flower was a saint herb that possessed the ability to nurture a deficient soul, but even it was powerless before such a formidable poison, thus resulting in its current state.

Zhang Xuan had been single-mindedly thinking about nurturing Wei Ruyan's soul to rouse her consciousness and treat her body that he had neglected the potency of her Poison Soul Constitution!

If the Ten-leafed Flower died, Wei Ruyan's soul would lose its binding to the world and dissipate swiftly!

It was fortunate that Sun Qiang had noticed it early, or else she could have lost her life just like that.

I should take a look at how far her soul has been nourished first...

Not daring to waste any time, Zhang Xuan drew out his soul and observed the soul infused within the flower.

A moment later, his expression turned livid.

The nurturing of the Ten-leafed Flower could easily nurse even the weakest of souls back to perfect health within ten days, but Wei Ruyan's Poison Soul Constitution was simply too powerful. Putting aside how it had nearly poisoned the saint herb to death, it had also rendered its property to nurture souls nearly completely ineffective!

In other words, Wei Ruyan's soul might have recovered slightly over the ten days, but it was still in an extremely feeble state. It would take a lot more before she could regain her consciousness.

At the current rate, if I wish to bring back her consciousness, I will require... at least a hundred thousand Ten-leafed Flowers! Zhang Xuan clenched his fists tightly.

Just to obtain this Ten-leafed Flower, he had caused a huge ruckus and nearly crippled the Physician School for good. A hundred thousand Ten-leafed Flowers... Where in the world could he find that many?!

It clearly wasn't feasible!

It seems like... I will have to try looking for a higher tier saint herb than the Ten-leafed Flower! Zhang Xuan frowned.

While the Ten-leafed Flower was a saint herb, it was of the lowest tier. To put it in terms of human cultivation realm, it was only at Saint 1-dan. Naturally, its ability to counteract poison and its potency in nurturing souls would be weaker.

If a higher tier saint herb was used, the effectiveness of the treatment could be increased significantly, and he wouldn't have to go through so much trouble as to gather a mountain of saint herbs.

But... it was so difficult to find even a stalk of a living Ten-leafed Flower in Hongyuan City, could he really find a higher tier living saint herb that had the ability to nurture souls here as well?

For the time being, I should return her soul to her body first...

Knowing that it was futile to think about it at the moment, Zhang Xuan instructed Sun Qiang to carry Wei Ruyan's body over before drawing her soul out of the Ten-leafed Flower.

The extracted soul still looked extremely weak. Even after it was returned to its body, Wei Ruyan showed no sign of regaining consciousness.

Looking at the unconscious young lady before him, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella. I should just forge the Grand

Intermittence Pill for the moment. By nourishing her body, her soul will be strengthened along with it, thus stabilizing her current condition... With that, I should be able to gain some time to find a higher tier saint herb!

An affliction that could render innumerable 6-star physicians helpless, Wei Ruyan's condition was clearly not as easy to treat.

Zhang Xuan had thought that everything would fall into place once he found a living saint herb to nurture her soul, but reality had shown that his thinking was too naive.

Putting everything else aside, just the fact that her Poison Soul Constitution could render most saint herb ineffective was a tough hurdle to overcome.

Shaking his head grimly, Zhang Xuan drew out his soul and transferred his soul essence to Wei Ruyan to nourish her soul, stabilizing her condition for the time being.

After this was done, he heaved a sigh of relief.

While the Ten-leafed Flower had failed to bring back Wei Ruyan's consciousness, it hadn't been completely ineffective. At the very least, it had pulled her back from the brink of death for the time being.

As long as he could successfully forge the Grand Intermittence Pill and return vitality to her body, she should be able to last until he found a suitable saint herb to treat her.

"Young Master, Apothecary Lu and the others have arrived!" Sun Qiang reported.

Nodding, Zhang Xuan tasked Sun Qiang to take care of Wei Ruyan before heading to the main hall to meet Apothecary Lu and the others.

As soon as Zhang Xuan walked into the room, Apothecary Lu and the others hurriedly stood up and greeted him. "Zhang shi!"

"There is no need to stand on ceremony. I believe you should know why I gathered you all here today. I need your help in forging a grade-7 Grand Intermittence Pill."

Taking a seat, Zhang Xuan got straight to the point.

Even though they had an inkling of the reason when they made their way here, their faces still turned grim upon hearing those words.

As 6-star pinnacle apothecaries, they were more than confident in forging any grade-6 pills. However, to forge a grade-7 pill, not to mention, they would have to collaborate with people they had never worked with before... It was simply too difficult.

“Zhang shi, it is not that we are unwilling to help you, but we know our own limits, and... we fear that we might not be able to reach your expectations!” Apothecary Lu shook his head.

They had to admit that Zhang shi did possess an inconceivable talent for pill forging, but the Grand Intermittence Pill was one of the harder pills to forge even among grade-7 pills! It was impossible for them to succeed!

Noticing the lack of confidence among the apothecaries, Zhang Xuan reassured, “There is no need to worry, and you need not feel pressured as well. As long as you follow my instructions strictly, there shouldn’t be much of a problem!”

He could understand why they would feel apprehension at having to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill.

The gap between each rank grew exponentially larger as one progressed up any occupation.

Similarly, there was a huge gap between forging grade-6 pills and grade-7 pills. They had seen many of their peers devoting their lives to pill forging, only to never step through the final threshold.

As such, it was unimaginable for them to forge the Grand Intermittence Pill, the difficulty of which ranked amid the top among grade-7 pills.

“But even so, I still don’t think that we can do it...”
Apothecary Lu shook his head.

“All of us have tried many times to forge a grade-7 pill, but never have we succeeded before. On top of that, we don’t have

any experience collaborating with one another, so I fear that it is nigh impossible for us to succeed!”

The other apothecaries also shook their heads grimly.

Seeing that the apothecaries had no confidence at all, Zhang Xuan frowned.

Skill wasn't everything to forging a good pill, one's spirit, soul, and essence must be in the right place as well. This was especially so for a pill like the Grand Intermittence Pill, which harnessed vitality so overwhelming that it could regrow broken limbs. If the apothecaries carried such a pessimistic attitude, even if they were to get all of the steps correct, they would still be unable to forge a proper pill.

This was a problem of spirit and faith.

This was similar to how in his 1-star apothecary examination, one of his invigilators, Apothecary Chen Xiao, had managed to successfully forge Tranquil Heart Pills in his Pill Debate, but due to his own condition, the pill harnessed a death aura, which not only rendered the pill ineffective but could cause one's cultivation to go berserk as well.

A grade-7 pill would be Saint-tier at the very least, which meant that it would possess a spirit of its own. If the apothecary forging the pill suffered from a lack of spirit, how could the pill forging be successful?

Zhang Xuan only had one set of medicinal herbs, so there would be no second chances. Failure was a luxury he couldn't afford!

“Since none of you have the confidence, then... pardon me!”

Seeing the state that the apothecaries were in, Zhang Xuan knew that it would be difficult for him to make them regain their confidence anytime soon. However, he didn't have the time to spare at the moment. Thus, he flicked his wrist, and the pile of medicinal herbs fell to the ground. These were the medicinal herbs that the apothecaries had prepared and entrusted Sun Qiang to pass to him.

After which, he took a deep breath and began speaking. “Let's get straight down to business. Here are the medicinal herbs.

Apothecary Lu, extract the medicinal essence of the Goldsilver Burclover. Apothecary Qiu, process the Truebeard Flower under low heat. Apothecary Liu...”

Zhang Xuan issued instructions swiftly, and his words seemed to carry a unique rhythm to them, making it particularly pleasant to the ear.

The apothecaries were intending on refusing Zhang Xuan, but before they knew it, their bodies were already moving according to the other party’s instructions.

Impartation of Heaven’s Will?

Feeling how their bodies were moving against their will, the crowd narrowed their eyes in astonishment.

No matter how slow they were, it was obvious that the young man before them had used Impartation of Heaven’s Will against them!

But they were 6-star pinnacle master teachers, Saint realm experts, and their Soul Depths could be considered among the highest in the Master Teacher Academy. Never had they thought that they would succumb to the Impartation of Heaven’s Will of another so easily!

Even at the very least, his Soul Depth must have reached 21! they thought in shock.

To be able to make so many of them fall under his Impartation of Heaven’s Will so easily, it meant that the other party’s Soul Depth was significantly higher than theirs, very possibly reaching the level of a 7-star master teacher!

For a twenty-year-old freshman to possess a Soul Depth of 21... Such a genius was probably rare even within the Sage Clans!

Perhaps, under the young man’s leadership, they might just be able to produce a miracle!

[1] Hun and po are constituents of a person’s soul as believed by certain school of thoughts in Chinese philosophy.

849 Pill Mis

In the tattered Elder Hall of the Master Teacher Academy, Mu shi and the others couldn't help but fall in a daze as they stared at the destruction before them.

The Elder Hall had many years of history to it, and countless precious antiques and relics from the predecessors had been stored in it. But now... it had all been reduced to rubble.

To be able to reduce the entire area to this state with just the aura he exuded, collapsing even the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, Yang shi's prowess was too fearsome!

Wei Ranxue couldn't help but remark, "It seems like... Zhang shi's destructive capabilities were picked up from Yang shi!"

The other school heads nodded in agreement with bitter smiles.

Even though Zhang shi had destroyed quite a few of buildings since his enrollment, they could tell, that had happened due to a series of unfortunate coincidences, and it wasn't intentional. However, the matter with Yang shi was different. In a fit of rage, the entire Elder Hall just abruptly collapsed under his wrath...

That ability to destroy was clearly a level higher than Zhang shi's!

Tearing down walls and buildings without the slightest warning beforehand in the face of a disagreement...

It was truly fortunate that they didn't hurt his student!

If someone had really injured Zhang shi, wouldn't Yang shi tear down the Master Teacher Academy or even the entirety of Hongyuan City?

"It is really a blessing that there is a protective formation around the area which helped to conceal the destruction from

the eyes and ears of others, and Yang shi seemed to have held himself back as well, so the destruction isn't too widespread. Otherwise, the Master Teacher Academy would become the laughingstock of the entire Master Teacher Pavilion for years to come!" Mu shi said.

"Indeed!" The others nodded in agreement.

It was clear that Yang shi had reined in his immense strength, choosing to destroy only the Elder Hall, Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, and the buildings in the region in order to strike fear into their hearts. Otherwise, given the other party's incredible strength, if he had wished to see blood, putting aside just the handful of them present at the scene, it was questionable whether even the full force of the Qingyuan Conferred Empire Master Teacher Pavilion would be able to stop him!

"Repair those buildings within a day, and send out news to the relevant powers in the region to inform them that the new principal has been chosen, and they are invited to attend the inauguration ceremony," Mu shi instructed.

The others nodded in acknowledgement to his instructions.

"Right. As for the matter regarding Yang shi, since we are all master teachers, I believe that you should know what to do even without me saying so. As per the norm, make sure to seal your lips tight. Anyone who fails to do so will be punished according to the crime of betraying humanity!" With his hands behind his back, Mu shi's eyes swept through the crowd with a gaze as sharp as a knife.

The whereabouts, appearance, and even students of a pinnacle master teacher like Yang shi were considered to be confidential secrets of the Master Teacher Pavilion. Juniors like them had no right to discuss such matters.

Otherwise, if news were to leak to the enemies of the Master Teacher Pavilion and some sort of mishap occurred, they would be unable to pay for their sins even if they were to die a thousand times over.

Mindful of the grave importance of the matter, the crowd nodded. “Understood.”

After which, Mu shi’s pressurizing gaze fell upon Lu Feng. “What about you, Lu Feng?”

Lu Feng had a grudge against Zhang shi, and it was also due to Zhang shi that he was going to suffer severe punishment from the Master Teacher Pavilion. If he were to attempt to exact vengeance on Zhang shi, it could potentially lead to dire consequences.

“It is my fault that the Elder Hall has been reduced to its current state. I will donate all my wealth to supplement the reparation cost for the destruction here. After which, I shall apply to become a guardian of the Subterranean Gallery!” Lu Feng said.

“You wish to go to the Subterranean Gallery?”

“This...”

Hearing this decision, everyone’s faces darkened. Even School Head Mo, who had a poor impression of Lu Feng, frowned upon hearing those words. “Are you certain?”

“I have been reflecting on my deeds, and I realized that in my pursuit to become the principal of Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, I have lost sight of what I stood for originally. Perhaps, I might be able to rediscover myself in the Subterranean Gallery. Even if death lies at the end of this path, I have no regrets!” Lu Feng nodded in determination.

When he looked back at his past, he realized that his aim had changed at some point in time. He had not started out as a person hungry for power, but under the intense rivalry amid the Ten Great Master Teachers and his desire to prove himself, the desire for the principal seat sparked in his mind, and before long, it had grown into a blazing flame.

And like a moth attracted to a flame, he found himself sinking deeper and deeper into his desire.

However, with Zhang shi decided as the next principal, the flame that had blinded his eyes vanished, and as if a man

awakening from a dream, he suddenly realized how ludicrous and shallow his actions had been.

The reason Kong shi established the Master Teacher Pavilion wasn't to bask in the respect and glory of it, nor was it to serve as a tool to vie for power and claim supremacy. It was to guard mankind and bring it to greater heights.

But the allure of power was simply too difficult for any man to resist. Even the most steadfast of master teachers could stumble easily in its face and lose the faith they had held resolutely at the start of their journey.

“Since you have made such a decision, I will not report this matter to the headquarters for the time being and allow you to remain as a 6-star master teacher. However, I hope that you remember your promise. Don't let the Master Teacher Pavilion and yourself down anymore!” Mu shi said.

Hearing that Mu shi was willing to give him another chance, Lu Feng's eyes reddened in agitation. “Thank you, Mu shi!”

For a moment, he suddenly recalled the oath he had made when he first became a master teacher several centuries ago, and the surge of passion that he had felt back then ran through his old body once more.

Following which, Mu shi turned to School Head Zhao and instructed, “Zhao Bingxu, you will be in charge of liaising with the powers and inviting them to the inauguration ceremony. Remember not to reveal the matter of Zhang shi being the succeeding principal for the time being! He is still too weak at the moment, so it is necessary that we take such precautions to ensure his safety. Once he receives the Principal's Seal in the inauguration ceremony, there will be no need for us to worry about his safety anymore...”

“Understood!” Zhao Bingxu nodded.

“As for Mo Zhu and Wei Ranxue, you will be in charge of keeping a lookout on the internal state of the academy. Take note of the atmosphere in the academy and make sure to quell any unnatural movements that might not be conducive to the inauguration ceremony...” Mu shi continued.

However, halfway through his words, the ground suddenly began trembling, and a deafening blast reverberated from the distance.

Hearing the explosion, Mu shi narrowed his eyes. “What happened?”

Along with the other school heads gathered in the Elder Hall, he immediately headed in the direction of where the explosion originated from.

A short distance away from the academy, they saw an entire row of collapsed residences. It seemed like the explosion had originated from that area.

Mo Zhu’s eyes narrowed, and he exclaimed in astonishment, “Isn’t that... Zhang shi’s manor?”

He had heard that King Huai had given Zhang Xuan a manor, and he had looked into the matter as well. Naturally, he knew where the manor was as well.

But this... why would it collapse out of the blue?

“It can’t be that Zhang shi, in a fit of anger... decided to destroy his own manor as well?” Wei Ranxue gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

It was said that just for the renovations, King Huai had spent hundreds of high-tier spirit stones. Yet, in an instant, that extravagant manor was reduced to rubble along with dozens of residences in the surroundings.

This was an even greater tragedy than what had happened to the Elder Hall!

They had known that wherever Zhang Xuan went, destruction wouldn’t be too far away, but to destroy his own manor as well... This was way too exaggerated!

They had seen people going on a rampage and punching others, but they had never seen anyone going on a rampage and punching themselves!

“It doesn’t seem like he has torn down his manor intentionally. Look!” At that moment, Mu shi abruptly pointed upward.

Hong long!

As if in response to his words, a violent jolt suddenly occurred from the direct center of the area of destruction, and a seven-colored mist abruptly burst forth, illuminating the surroundings.

“This is... Pill Mist?”

“Pill Mist? Legend has it that it will only appear when a grade-8 pill is forged...”

“The higher grade a pill is, the more potent it will be. Upon reaching a certain point, it has to suffer a backlash from the heavens as well. The Pill Mist is a form of heavenly tribulation that appears with the forging of grade-8 pills... Just what in the world is Zhang shi forging? How could Pill Mist appear here?”

...

Upon taking a closer look at the form of the mist, the school heads immediately recognized what it was, and they nearly lost their sanity.

Pill Mist, just as the name suggested, was a phenomenon that occurred in the midst of the forging of a grade-8 pill. For it to appear, didn't it mean that... Zhang shi was attempting to forge a grade-8 pill?

“No, it isn't a grade-8 pill. If that were the case, there would be a tribulation within the Pill Mist, but the fact that it is absent means that it is highly unlikely that the pill forged has reached grade-8 yet. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it is a grade-7 pinnacle at the very minimum, and the chances are that it is an Inscribed Pill as well. Otherwise, such a phenomenon wouldn't have occurred!” Mu shi said with a frown.

He had once had the privilege of witnessing the formation of a grade-8 pill with his own eyes. Not only was there Pill Mist, even the apothecary himself had to undergo a lightning tribulation as well. Through the refinement of lingering lightning sparks, the pill would be further perfected, thus forming a sentient spirit within it.

However, the fact that there was only the Pill Mist but no lightning tribulation meant that the grade of the pill forged hadn't reached the mark yet.

“A grade-7 pinnacle Inscribed Pill?”

Everyone's mouths twitched in astonishment.

That was likely to be more valuable than most ordinary grade-8 pills!

Pills could be classified into four tiers of quality: Formation, Satiation, Perfection, and Inscribed Pill.

Even within their academy, Inscribed Pill was a thing of the legends. Only very few apothecaries had achieved it in their lifetime. Yet, to think that Zhang Shi would manage to achieve this level of quality while forging a grade-7 pill...

Was this for real?

“Let's go over to take a look!”

Unable to hold back their curiosity, the school heads hurriedly flew over.

...

In Hongyuan Empire's royal palace, a middle-aged man was currently sitting before a golden table with a brush in his hand, browsing through memorials.

The emperor of Hongyuan Empire, Yu Fei-er's father, Yu Shenqing!

He had a dense layer of zhenqi shrouding around him, morphing into the forms of many beasts such as dragons and tigers, projecting an authoritative disposition that put others at bay.

Even though he wasn't driving his cultivation, judging by the aura he commanded by itself, it seemed that Yu Shenqing possessed strength on par with School Head Mo and the others—Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle.

A eunuch walked into the room and reported, “Your Majesty, we have completed the preparations for the banquet tonight!”

“Un!” Putting down his brush, Yu Shenqing pinched his glabella before asking, “What did Fei-er say? Did she manage to invite Zhang Xuan over?”

“Reporting to Your Majesty, Her Highness says that Zhang shi has received the invitation and that he will be here tonight!” the eunuch reported.

“That’s good. I would love to see the young man who dares to make my daughter his maid!” Yu Shenqing harrumphed in displeasure.

“Your Majesty, that Zhang shi has caused quite a huge ruckus in the Master Teacher Academy, so he is likely to be a man with great capability... However, to make Her Highness his personal maid, he has indeed overstepped his boundaries!” the eunuch said.

“Indeed! I have doted on my daughter ever since she was born, and it pains me deeply to even chide or nag at her. And yet, he actually dared to take advantage of her... I sure would like to see how many heads that fellow has! I will make sure to teach him a lesson when he arrives later on so that he learns what humility is...” Yu Shenqing’s gaze turned cold.

At that moment, the ground beneath him suddenly tremored violently.

Frowning deeply, Yu Shenqing instructed, “What happened? Go and take a look!”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Hearing those words, the eunuch hurriedly rushed out of the palace.

Not too long later, the eunuch returned with a bizarre look on his face. “Reporting to Your Majesty, it seems like... Zhang shi has destroyed the manor that King Huai gifted him!”

“He destroyed his own manor?” Yu Shenqing was taken aback.

“That’s right. That Zhang shi... When he went to the Blacksmith School, the Blacksmith School collapsed. When he went to the Physician School, the Physician School collapsed. When he went to the Apothecary School, the Apothecary

School collapsed... Now, when he returned to his own manor, even his manor collapsed... He really brings destruction wherever he goes!” the eunuch remarked.

“Brings destruction wherever he goes?” Yu Shenqing’s mouth twitched.

“This... Shall we cancel the banquet tonight then? Or... why don’t we just cancel our invitation to Zhang Xuan! No, that won’t do. It would be a breach of etiquette if we were to cancel the banquet or our invitation abruptly... Since that’s the case, help me invite Formation Master Wu over and have him set up a dozen Fortification Formations in case anything happens!”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” The eunuch was slightly stunned for an instant before nodding and backing out from the palace.

850 Bodhi Saint Tree

When Mu shi arrived at Zhang Xuan's manor, they realized that Senior Byzantium Helios had wrapped everyone within his power, so no one had been injured in the catastrophe.

At this very instant, Zhang shi was standing before a towering cauldron, bellowing furiously.

“What did you guarantee me before the pill forging? To be unable to withstand even the medicinal energy of a mere grade-7 pill, how can you have the cheek to call yourself a Saint artifact? Saint artifact your head!”

He was indeed very infuriated by this incident.

That fellow had promised him that it would have no trouble forging a grade-7 pill. That was the reason he had gone to the extent of using the Impartation of Heaven's Will to control Apothecary Lu and the others so as to guarantee that there were no mistakes in the steps at all.

All of the medicinal herbs prepared were of excellent maturity, and there was no mistake whatsoever, so the pill was swiftly formed.

Yet... in the instant that the pill was formed, it turned out that the one who would drag his feet wasn't Apothecary Lu and the others but the Guardian Saint Artifact of the Master Teacher Academy, Golden Origin Cauldron!

Unable to properly hold in the rampaging energies harnessed within it, the lid of the Golden Origin Cauldron abruptly burst open, resulting in the energies destroying everything in the area.

It was fortunate that no one was injured, but his manor... It was gone just like that!

“I-I didn't know that you were going to forge such a potent pill either...” Berated by Zhang Xuan, the Golden Origin Cauldron tried to explain itself indignantly.

It was indeed a Saint artifact, but it was a weapon cauldron and not a pill cauldron. Even though a formation had been cast over it to manage the temperature regulation, its physical structure still wasn't optimized for pill forging. Forging an ordinary grade-7 pill was already stretching its limits, but the pill that Zhang Xuan was forging just had to be the Grand Intermittence Pill... It was already a huge blessing that it wasn't blown to smithereens on the spot!

"If you had been able to hold on, that pill would have surely reached grade-8! Look, due to your error, the final product is only a grade-7 Inscribed Pill. What a huge waste of those precious medicinal herbs!" Zhang Xuan harrumphed coldly.

He knew that the Golden Origin Cauldron couldn't be blamed for this matter, but he simply couldn't hold back his rage.

One must know that there was a huge qualitative difference between a grade-7 Inscribed Pill and grade-8 pill!

It was such a waste of Jiang Qingqin's Phoenix Timber Core and the high maturity medicinal herbs that the other old elders of the Apothecary School had prepared for him!

"Grade-8? Grade-7 Inscribed Pill?"

On the other hand, after hearing those words, Apothecary Lu and the others finally understood what kind of pill they had just forged, and their bodies wouldn't stop trembling in excitement.

Big Brother, the Grand Intermittence Pill is a grade-7 pill in itself. It is already an incredible feat to forge it to the level of an Inscribed Pill. There is no guarantee that 8-star pinnacle apothecaries would be capable of doing the same.

And yet, you were thinking of forging it to the level of a grade-8 pill?

Man, you are really about to break out of the atmosphere!

"Forget it. At the very least, the pill is fine. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to compensate for it even if I were to sell you off!" After berating the Golden Origin Cauldron one last time, he took a deep breath and released his anger before storing the pill in a jade bottle.

After which, he finally noticed the presence of Mu shi and the others. He clasped his fist and greeted, “Mu shi, school heads!”

Recognizing the pill, Mu shi asked, to verify the matter, “Senior Uncle... the pill that you have just forged, is it the Grand Intermittence Pill?”

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“To be able to forge the grade-7 Grand Intermittence Pill to the point that Pill Mist is produced... Inconceivable, truly inconceivable!” Mu shi exclaimed. “The Grand Intermittence Pill has the ability to regrow limbs. If it isn’t inconvenient, may I ask why Senior Uncle is forging this pill?”

As a pill overflowing with vitality, the Grand Intermittence Pill could heal even the most severe injuries and even induce the regrowing of limbs. It wouldn’t be too far off to claim that the pill only fell short of bringing back the dead. Not to mention, the pill that Zhang Xuan had forged was just a step away from reaching grade-8.

“It is to save a junior,” Zhang Xuan replied.

After which, he gestured for the Byzantium Helios Beast to bring Wei Ruyan over before taking out the jade bottle once more.

“Is this the person whom Senior Uncle hopes to save?” Mu shi frowned.

“That’s right.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“This young lady’s body is currently too frail. I fear that your Grand Intermittence Pill might be a little too potent for her current condition. The chances are that it could end up worsening her condition instead,” Mu shi said.

As the common adage among physicians went, ‘over-nourishment kills the frail’.

Even for a Saint realm 3-dan expert like him, it would be difficult to absorb and assimilate the overwhelming medicinal energy contained within that Grand Intermittence Pill fully, let alone an unconscious and frail young lady.

Most likely, her body would be utterly destroyed by the overwhelming medicinal energy before it could work its wonders.

“It’s not a problem.” Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

He uncorked the jade bottle, and a dense surge of spiritual energy immediately gushed into the surroundings. In the next instant, a pill abruptly surged into the air, attempting to flee.

At the level of a Grade-7 Inscribed Pill, the Grand Intermittence Pill possessed spirit, granting it the instinctive ability to avert danger. Even though it hadn’t developed sentience yet, given sufficient time, it could develop sentience like the Golden Origin Cauldron. If it were allowed to continue developing, a day might come when it could even morph into a human.

“Trying to flee? Come back!”

However, Zhang Xuan seemed to have expected that the pill would react in such a manner. With a cold harrumph, he abruptly closed his fists, and a surge of energy suddenly emerged from the pill itself, sealing its movements.

Following which, the pill was forcefully pulled back to the ground by the surge of energy.

Having gone through the books in the library of the Apothecary School, Zhang Xuan knew that grade-7 pills possessed such a property, so he had left a hand in advance.

Using his zhenqi to support the Wei Ruyan’s lower jaw, Zhang Xuan opened her mouth and fed her the Grand Intermittence Pill.

Tzzzzzzzz!

As soon as the pill entered her body, a sizzling sound reminiscent of searing metal coming in contact with iced water sounded. At the same time, Wei Ruyan’s ghastly pale face gradually began to regain a healthy red glow. However, a short moment later, it stopped.

At this point, even though Wei Ruyan seemed to be in a better state than before, she was still in a deep sleep, and there was

no sign of her regaining consciousness.

Zhang Xuan quickly placed his fingers on the other party's pulse before heaving a sigh of relief.

If it had been someone else, perhaps they might have succumbed to the overwhelming medicinal energy contained within the Grand Intermittence Pill and died.

However, Wei Ruyan was a unique case. Her unique constitution was so powerful that she could even poison a saint herb like the Ten-leafed Flower while unconscious. A grade-7 Inscribed Pill might contain immense medicinal energy within it, but most of it had turned into nutrients to feed her Innate Poison Body.

While the Grand Intermittence Pill wasn't enough to cure her affliction entirely, it did help her body to recover to perfect health. Even the trauma that she had suffered back in her mother's womb had healed as well.

With the recovery of her body, even if her soul remains unconscious for the time being, she shouldn't be in any danger... Zhang Xuan thought.

"To still remain unconscious despite having consumed the Grand Intermittence Pill... Senior Uncle, what kind of affliction is this young lady suffering from?" Mu shi asked in astonishment.

One must know that the Grand Intermittence Pill was so potent that it would be difficult for him to bear it! It was one thing for a frail patient to be fine after consuming it, but for her to remain unconscious after that, the affliction she was suffering from sure was fearsome!

"On top of her frail physical body, her soul has suffered some damage as well. Even though her body has recovered with the consumption of the Grand Intermittence Pill, her soul is still far too weak for her to regain consciousness," Zhang Xuan explained.

At that instant, he suddenly thought of something and asked, "Mu shi, do you know where I can obtain living saint herbs that can nurture souls? I need as many of those as possible!"

He didn't have any clue as to where he could find saint herbs to nourish Wei Ruyan's soul, but Mu shi might know where he could source them.

After a moment of contemplation, Mu shi shook his head. "I do know of a few places that sell saint herbs capable of nurturing souls, but all of them are dried. Living saint herbs... I really don't have any idea in mind."

"You don't know either?" Zhang Xuan sighed in disappointment.

He could easily find dried saint herbs in the Apothecary School and Physician School as well, but it was a pity that those were useless for Wei Ruyan's current condition.

For his treatment, the saint herb must be alive.

At this moment, Zhong Dingchun, who was among the group of school heads who had gone over to check out the situation, abruptly spoke up. "Zhang shi, if you really require a living saint herb, I do know of one in Hongyuan City!"

As the head of the Physician School, he maintained an intelligence network on medicinal herbs so that he could easily source them when he required them.

"Oh? Where is it?" Zhang Xuan asked anxiously.

"In the royal palace of Hongyuan Empire, there is a Bodhi Saint Tree. It is known to possess exceptional effectiveness in nurturing souls," Zhong Dingchun said.

"Bodhi Saint Tree?" Zhang Xuan frowned. He had never heard of such a tree before.

"Rumor has it that the tree was brought back from the wilderness by the ancestors of the current Hongyuan royal family. Knowing that it has the effect of nurturing souls, they chose to plant it in the royal palace to benefit the generations to come. This is the reason the royal offspring of Hongyuan Empire possess exceptionally powerful souls!"

After a moment of hesitation, Zhong Dingchun continued, "However, the tree is one of the most important treasures of

the royal family, so I fear that they might not be willing to lend it to you!”

“I see...” Stroking his lower jaw, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

“It happens that there is a banquet at the royal palace tonight. I should make use of the opportunity to take a look at the Bodhi Tree and determine if it will be effective on Wei Ruyan first. If it is, it will be worth giving it a shot.

“Anyway, thank you for your advice, School Head Zhong!” Zhang Xuan clasped his fist.

“There is no need to stand on ceremony, Zhang shi!” Zhong Dingchun hurriedly replied.

After which, Zhang Xuan tried asking for some more details regarding the Bodhi Tree, but it seemed like the others didn’t know much about it either. Thus, he could only shake his head helplessly.

“Zhang shi, I will send some men to help you repair your manor,” Zhao Bingxu said.

It would be truly tragic if the future principal of the Master Teacher Academy were to be rendered homeless, and such publicity could have adverse effects on the inauguration ceremony three days later.

“I will be depending on you, School Head Zhao!” Zhang Xuan nodded in gratitude.

If only he’d known that such a mishap would occur in the forging of the Grand Intermittence Pill, he would have surely taken the others to a clearing to conduct the pill forging. At the very least, he wouldn’t have ended up destroying his own residence.

“Un!” Zhao Bingxu nodded.

After which, Mu shi and the school heads bade farewell and returned to the Master Teacher Academy.

It had already been afternoon when Zhang Xuan first returned to his manor from the Saint Ascension Platform. After which, he had attended the hearing at the Elder Hall and forged the

Grand Intermittence Pill. Time passed swiftly, and unknowingly, the sun had already set, allowing darkness to permeate the sky.

Looking at the rubble, Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before gently placing Wei Ruyan in the Myriad Anthive and instructing Sun Qiang, Wang Ying, and the others to spend their night at the residences in the Master Teacher Academy, which they were allocated as guest elders of the Martial Arts School.

After this was done, he was just about to make his way to the royal palace to attend the banquet when something suddenly caught his eye, and he stopped in his tracks.

His gaze swept across his surroundings, and he couldn't help but notice that the rubble around him seemed to be laid in a formation resembling a massive dragon prowling the grounds.

Is this... the earth dragon? Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed in astonishment.

Looking at this formation, he couldn't help but recall the clue that he had obtained from Wu Yangzi regarding the location of his treasure!

In his old residence, beneath Three Stars of the Earth Dragon!

If what he was seeing before him was the earth dragon in the clue, then... what could the three stars be?

Zhang Xuan immediately turned his gaze upward.

Countless stars scattered throughout the seemingly endless night sky came into sight.

How am I to know which three stars Wu Yangzi is referring to? Zhang Xuan frowned in frustration.

All he had received from the clue was 'Three Stars of the Earth Dragon'. There was no clue as to which three stars it was referring to, or even their general location!

He might have found the earth dragon, but without the three stars, he wouldn't be able to pinpoint the location of the treasure. Was he supposed to overturn every inch of ground in the manor to find the treasure?

Besides, if it was possible to find the treasure by doing so, it would have long been uncovered by someone else in the last two thousand years.

Thinking that it might be helpful to get a bird's eye view, Zhang Xuan executed the Red Dust Heaven Ascending Steps and leaped into the sky.

The collapsed rubble seemed to meander on the ground, connecting with the dark sky at the horizon, as if a massive dragon that was on the verge of soaring into the heavens.

Eye of Insight!

Knowing that it was impossible to find it just like that, Zhang Xuan activated his Eye of Insight before turning his gaze to the point where the earth dragon intersected with the dark sky.

851 Scarlet Firefly Frui

At the point where the earth dragon and the dark sky intersected was a river that flowed along the walls of the academy and into the depths of the seemingly boundless darkness.

Looking along the body of the earth dragon, there were several ponds with flowers and trees by the side. It resembled patches of clouds, which further accentuated the image of a dragon rising to the heavens.

After studying the area for over ten minutes, Zhang Xuan's head was starting to spin from overusing his Eye of Insight. Shaking his head, he could only stop there.

From what he had deduced so far, it seemed like the three stars Wu Yangzi had referred to weren't literal stars or a figurative description of the geography. It didn't seem like he would be able to figure out what it was with just a quick glance, and a more thorough investigation was required.

Nevertheless, having found the earth dragon, he was already at the halfway mark to finding Wu Yangzi's treasure. As long as he were to put in some more effort, he should be able to find the three stars easily.

After all, if Wu Yangzi was willing to reveal the location of his treasure, he would have hidden it with the expectation that someone would be able to find it.

Thinking that he should head to the banquet first and continue his investigation after that, Zhang Xuan was just about to descend back to the ground when he saw a figure in the distance flitting swiftly toward the manor.

"Hu Yaoyao? What is she doing here at this time?" Zhang Xuan muttered under his breath.

The Eye of Insight could peer through the darkness, thus allowing Zhang Xuan to recognize the other party immediately. However, it didn't seem like she had noticed him

in the sky, bypassing him and rushing straight to a vantage point amid the rubble.

Despite being a Chrysalis realm pinnacle expert, it still wasn't easy for her to find a person in the dark. Flicking her wrist, she took out a Night Illumination Pearl and began scanning the area carefully.

“Zhang laoshi!” she shouted.

As an apprentice, her relationship to Zhang Xuan was reminiscent to that of a teacher and a student, so she had changed the way she addressed him accordingly.

Zhang Xuan was just about to descend back to the ground to reply to her call when he suddenly noticed something. The faint glow of the Night Illumination Pearl in Hu Yaoyao's hand was reflected in a pond not too far away from where she stood, and from his point of view, it bore an uncanny resemblance to a star.

“Could it be...”

Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he hurriedly turned his gaze to the other ponds in the courtyard as well. As expected, as if resonating to one another, the faint radiance of the Night Illumination Pearl was reflected in their surfaces as well.

This addition to the formation created a picturesque sight of the earth dragon traversing across the night sky, journeying in the accompaniment of the stars.

Over the past two thousand years, the layout of the manor has gone through massive changes. Perhaps, at the very start, there might only have been three ponds... I will have to find the original three stars then!

There should only be three stars according to the message left behind by Wu Yangzi. If the light reflected in the ponds were the stars mentioned in the clue, he had too many of them at the moment.

However, this didn't necessarily mean that Zhang Xuan's direction was wrong. Too long a time had passed, so the layout of the manor could have undergone numerous changes.

Others might stumble before this problem, but this isn't an issue to me... Zhang Xuan smiled confidently.

It would be difficult for even Mu Shi to decisively determine which of the current eight ponds were existent two thousand years ago, but this was a piece of cake for Zhang Xuan. With the Eye of Insight, he could easily tell how long each pond had been around for.

In just a few moments, he had already confirmed which the three ponds he was looking for.

After which, he swiftly mapped out the midpoint of the triangle formed by the three stars.

The resulting location was a towering ancient pine tree positioned just in front of the manor's main hall.

It seems like the treasure is hidden beneath the pine tree! Zhang Xuan thought.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan descended to the ground and walked up to Hu Yaoyao.

"You were looking for me?"

"Zhang laoshi, you are fine! I really didn't expect you to go so far just to find Wu Yangzi's treasure..." Hu Yaoyao was visibly relieved for a moment after seeing Zhang Xuan before gesturing to her surroundings speechlessly.

Do you know how much this manor cost? If you do, how could you destroy it like that?

Even if it is to find Wu Yangzi's treasure, surely you didn't have to reduce the manor to this state?

Black lines streaked across Zhang Xuan's face as he heard those words. "I didn't do this to find the treasure. It was an accident..."

"It can't be that you came here to watch the commotion after hearing that the manor has collapsed?"

"N-no, it's not that... I have something that I need your help on!" Hu Yaoyao said.

She had heard about the treasure that Wu Yangzi had left behind, but many of her predecessors had already attempted to find it, to no avail. Thinking that there was little hope in that direction, she had decided to not pay it any heed.

“What’s wrong?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

While Hu Yaoyao was docile before him, she was still one of the most influential figures in the Master Teacher Academy, and she had many tricks up her sleeves as well. What kind of matter could it be that would require his help?

Hu Yaoyao hesitated for a moment before speaking. “To tell you the truth, Dong Xin, Long Cangyue, Xue Zhenyang, and I have found a treasure that can increase the chances of making the breakthrough to Half-Saint by twenty percent...

“Naturally, we are planning to obtain the treasure, but... there are two powerful beasts guarding it, and we aren’t a match for them. Thus, we hope to seek your help for this matter!”

“A treasure?” Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

Back then, he had once followed Hu Yaoyao to a gazebo and overheard them speaking about some kind of treasure maturing by the end of the month, and looking at the current date, it did seem to be about time to harvest it.

“That’s right. You possess both strength and knowledge, so we were unable to think of anyone more suitable to help us with this matter than you,” Hu Yaoyao said.

Even though the four of them were powerful figures who no one dared to offend in the academy, for some reason, all of them had stumbled before him. She had become his apprentice, Xue Zhenyang had become his grandstudent, and Dong Xin, the most pitiful one of them, had not only become his great grandstudent but was expelled from the academy as well.

Long Cangyue, who had chosen not to take any action, was the sole survivor of their group.

Typically speaking, considering how three out of four of them had some kind of grudge with Zhang Xuan, they would be reluctant to seek his help. However, with that object’s date of

maturity swiftly approaching, they were pressed on time. They had to make a move soon or else those two huge fellows would have devoured it for themselves. By then, they would be left with nothing at all.

Thus, after some serious discussion, they had eventually decided to seek Zhang Xuan's help.

That fellow might be the God of Destruction, but he had proven that he was a capable individual on multiple occasions. Otherwise, the three of them wouldn't have been subdued by him either.

"To be able to increase the chances of making a breakthrough to Half-Saint by twenty percent, what kind of treasure is it?" Zhang Xuan asked curiously.

Back at the Saint Ascension Platform, he had seen many insights from the predecessors, and from that, he had gained a rough understanding of how difficult it was to make a breakthrough from Chrysalis realm to Half-Saint. To talents like that, twenty percent could make a huge difference.

Under the dim light of the Night Illumination Pearl, Zhang Xuan could see Hu Yaoyao biting her crimson lips together hesitantly before saying, "It is the Saint realm medicinal herb... the Scarlet Firefly Fruit!"

"Scarlet Firefly Fruit?" Zhang Xuan pondered for a moment before his eyes abruptly lit up.

He had heard of the Scarlet Firefly Fruit before. It was a saint herb with a scarlet exterior, and upon maturity, it would release a beautiful fluorescent light reminiscent of a firefly.

Growing by absorbing sunlight and moonlight, the fruit had a maturity period of a hundred years. On top of that, it was extremely rare and couldn't be artificially cultivated, thus making it very difficult to obtain.

While consuming the Scarlet Firefly Fruit wouldn't guarantee a breakthrough to Half-Saint, its ability to increase the chances at doing so was more than sufficient to make Chrysalis realm cultivators go insane over it. Even Zhang Xuan was moved by its effects as well.

Even though Zhang Xuan's cultivation was only at Ethereal Treading realm primary stage at the moment, around two realms away from reaching Half-Saint, given his current rate of cultivation, as long as he had sufficient high-tier spirit stones and the relevant cultivation technique, he should be able to reach it within six hours.

The compilation of insights from the Saint Ascension Platforms had already greatly boosted his chances at making a breakthrough, and the aid of the Scarlet Firefly Fruit could make his breakthrough go even more smoothly.

For one, as a cultivator of the Heaven's Path Divine Art, the spiritual energy he required to make a breakthrough was enormous. While he did obtain quite a lot of Earth Vein Spirit Essence from the Cloudmist Ridge, it was hard to tell if it would still be effective by the time he reached Chrysalis realm.

After all, the Earth Vein Spirit Vine was still slightly lacking in purity. However, if he could obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruit... he could confidently say that Half-Saint was finally within sight!

"That's right. Based on our investigation, there is a total of ten Scarlet Firefly Fruits in the area. As long as you help us obtain them, we will split them equally among us, meaning that each of us will obtain two fruits!" Hu Yaoyao said.

"Two each?" Zhang Xuan stroked his lower jaw in contemplation before nodding slightly. "I am fine with that!"

Given that he hadn't participated in the scouting and the preparation work, it was indeed not bad that he was going to receive an equal share.

And of course, if he were to contribute more than proportionately to the obtaining of the Scarlet Firefly Fruits later on, he could always renegotiate the distribution then.

"So, you will help us?"

Honestly speaking, Hu Yaoyao had thought that Zhang Xuan would try to bargain for more favorable terms for himself, so

she was slightly taken aback when she heard him agreeing to it so readily.

“Of course!” Zhang Xuan nodded. “When are we setting off?”

“We can set off now if you are ready. We will be riding on Dong Xin’s tamed beast, and it will take roughly three days for us to arrive at our destination. So, even at the very minimum, our trip will take seven to eight days!” Hu Yaoyao said.

“Seven to eight days?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

His inauguration ceremony as the next principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy was three days from now, so he couldn’t afford to leave for such a long period of time now.

“That’s right. We have made a rough calculation of when the Scarlet Firefly Fruit will mature, but we will be arriving earlier to give us some leeway in case it matures earlier. However, if it matures later than we expected, we might end up spending a few more days there,” Hu Yaoyao said.

“You are saying that the trip could be even longer than that?”

Didn’t that mean that he might spend nearly half a month away from the academy?

That was too long!

He could potentially raise his cultivation to Nascent Saint in half a month. To waste it for a mere Half-Saint was not worth the time and effort.

And most importantly of all, he would miss the inauguration ceremony as well.

“But the inauguration ceremony for the new principal of the academy is three days from now. If we leave now, we will definitely miss it,” Zhang Xuan said.

“I have heard of the matter, too. According to the rumors, the reason Mu Shi was sent to our academy was to nominate our next principal. I sure do wonder who our next principal is... I tried asking my teacher, but she refused to say anything about the matter. However, it should probably be either School Head Lu or School Head Zhao. They are the most respected elders

in the academy, and they wield the greatest influence as well. Thus, the probability of them becoming the next principal should be the highest!”

At which, Hu Yaoyao smiled and reassured, “Don’t worry, I have asked my teacher, and she has granted me the special privilege to skip on the inauguration ceremony to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruit. Besides, Zhang laoshi, you aren’t a student of the academy now, so it shouldn’t matter to you who becomes the next principal of the academy, right?”

As the leader of the Bewitching Devil Faction, she had heard about the conflict between School Head Lu and Zhang Xuan, and how the latter had been kicked out of the academy.

Given that Zhang Xuan wasn’t even considered a student of the academy anymore, it shouldn’t matter to him who became the next principal.

Naturally, he should have nothing to do with the inauguration ceremony.

“This...” A bitter smile surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s lips.

It just so happened that he did have a role to play in the inauguration ceremony, and a huge one at that.

“You should quickly make your decision. The Scarlet Firefly Fruit will be maturing in the next few days, so we have to set off as soon as possible!” Hu Yaoyao urged.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan proposed, “Since that’s the case, let’s set off straight later in the night then. However, instead of riding Dong Xin’s tamed beast, I suggest that we ride on mine. We should be able to make a round trip within a day with that.”

He still had to attend the banquet at the royal palace to determine whether the Bodhi Saint Tree could be used to save Wei Ruyan or not before heading out.

Considering Dong Xin’s current cultivation realm, her tamed beast should also be at Chrysalis realm at the very most, so the speed of travel wouldn’t be too fast. However, if they were to ride on Byzantium Lad, they should be able to cover the three days’ journey within half a day.

That would save them quite a bit of time.

“Your tamed beast? You mean your Great Violetwing Beast?”
Hu Yaoyao frowned. “But its speed is likely to be slower than Dong Xin’s tamed beast, right?”

852 Wu Yangzi's Treasure

The Great Violetwing Beast was only at Half-Chrysalis realm whereas Dong Xin's tamed beast was a Chrysalis realm intermediate stage spirit beast.

The former might be capable of flying at fast speed, but in terms of overall performance, the latter was definitely superior.

Given that Dong Xin's tamed beast would require three days just to make a one-way trip, do you really believe that your Great Violetwing Beast could make a roundabout trip in a day? You must be joking!

"It's settled then. Meet me at Leiyuan Peak at the Zi hour[1] tonight, we will set off from there!" Zhang Xuan noticed the doubtful expression on Hu Yaoyao's face, but since they would understand when the time came, he didn't think that there was any need for him to explain himself.

"... Alright then." Seeing that Zhang Xuan was unwilling to speak, Hu Yaoyao didn't ask on as well. Turning around, she returned back to the Master Teacher Academy.

After she left the manor, Zhang Xuan didn't rush off to the royal palace to attend the banquet. Instead, he made his way to the ancient pine tree in the courtyard.

Since this tree was located beneath the Three Stars of the Earth Dragon, the treasure should be in its vicinity.

Activating the Eye of Insight, he began to examine the pine tree carefully. However, despite scrutinizing every inch of it, he was unable to find anything peculiar at all.

But that was to be expected. If it could be found that easily, someone else would have claimed the treasure long ago.

Wu Yangzi mentioned that I have to put down three formation flags according to the Three Stars, and the items will surface automatically...

Recalling the words Wu Yangzi had mentioned back then, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out three formation flags and a Night Illumination Pearl.

With a swift leap, he returned to the area where Hu Yaoyao stood previously and raised his Night Illumination Pearl up high. In an instant, three brilliant stars appeared in the three ponds scattered around the courtyard.

“Go!” With another flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan tossed the formation flags into the air.

Sou sou sou!

The three formation flags fell directly onto the stars in the three ponds simultaneously.

Weng!

With a faint buzz, the ground suddenly started rumbling slightly, as if the earth dragon had come to life. Following which, the towering pine tree abruptly burst apart, revealing a medium-sized metal box within.

Zhang Xuan rushed over and grabbed the box.

“Is this the treasure Wu Yangzi left behind? It sure is well-hidden!” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up in excitement.

Even though the box sprung from the pine tree, he could tell that it was actually not hidden within the pine tree but a hidden space inside.

In other words, had Zhang Xuan not found the three stars and inserted the three formation flags, he wouldn’t have been able to find the box even if he were to reduce the pine tree to dust.

Studying the pine tree carefully, it seemed like some kind of formation with a function reminiscent of a storage ring was set up around the area, and the center of the formation was where the pine tree was located. This was also the reason why Wu Yangzi’s treasure remained unfound even after two thousand years later.

“This is a Celestial Designer Mechanical Container!” After analyzing the tree, Zhang Xuan turned his attention back to the metal box.

Each Celestial Designer Mechanical Container was exquisitely built using a unique blueprint designed by a celestial designer. Without an understanding of the structure of the box, it was impossible to unlock it.

However, this wasn't a problem for Zhang Xuan.

Muttering 'Flaws!' beneath his breath, a book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path. He browsed through it quickly before tapping on sixteen different points on the box with his finger.

Kacha!

With a crisp click, a mechanism whirred into action, and the box was opened.

The first thing that Zhang Xuan saw inside the box was a pitch-black ore which was around the size of a fist. It emanated a bone-chilling frigid air.

"Since you found this box, it can only mean that I have met with some kind of mishap..."

Along with the whirring of the mechanism, a faint voice sounded in the air.

It was Wu Yangzi's voice.

You did meet with mishap... Upon thinking about how the number one blacksmith of Hongyuan Empire ended up being trapped within an underground cavern til his death, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but sigh deeply in lamentation.

Wu Yangzi thought that he was contributing to mankind by turning those Otherworldly Demons into puppets and killing them, but the truth was that Vicious was making use of his smithing capability to turn his subordinates into everlasting guards that could protect him until his comeback.

"Regardless of whether I have passed away or not, the fact that you were able to find my treasure means that there is fate between you and me. Contained in here are my most valuable possessions, so I hope that you can use them wisely.

"The ore in the box is known as the Black Goldcrystal Ore. I had to go to great lengths in order to obtain it. If you were to

add even a pinch of it into the weapon you are forging, you will be able to raise its quality up a notch.”

“Black Goldcrystal Ore? This is the Black Goldcrystal Ore?” Zhang Xuan’s breathing hastened in agitation.

As a 6-star pinnacle blacksmith, he had a deep understanding of the various valuable ores in the world. Of those, the Black Goldcrystal Ore was definitely one of the most expensive and rarest ores

Putting everything aside, if he had added a pinch of it into his Half-Saint Glacier Rain Sword during its forging process, he would have been able to successfully raise it to Saint-tier!

This was how valuable it was!

Just a pinch of it could have such miraculous effects, and an entire fist of it was sitting right before him... Its price was inestimable!

It would be hard to tell whether one could afford it even with ten thousand high-tier spirit stones on hand!

It was no wonder why Wu Yangzi would regard it as one of his most valuable possessions!

“But of course, an object that only has the effect of raising an artifact’s tier can’t be considered my greatest treasure. The second item I have left behind here is the manual of my Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body!” the voice continued.

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to the box, and he saw a secret manual labeled ‘Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body’ on its cover.

As he had already obtained it back in the underground chamber, he wasn’t particularly excited to see it.

“If you have obtained this cultivation technique from me elsewhere, the chances are that the cultivation technique you have received... is a fake! This is the only real version of Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body in the world, and only by cultivating this version will you be able to grasp the true essence of the technique. If you were to continue cultivating

the other version, your cultivation will eventually go berserk...” the voice revealed.

“The one in the underground chamber is a fake?” Astonished, Zhang Xuan swiftly picked up the book, and a replica appeared in the Library of Heaven’s Path.

He swiftly looking through the version in the Library of Heaven’s Path, and a moment later, he shook his head.

The book contained within this box was indeed different from the one Wu Yangzi left in the underground chamber, containing far fewer mistakes in it. However, that made no difference to Zhang Xuan.

He had already resolved most of the flaws of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body with his Library of Heaven’s Path back in the underground chamber when he first cultivated the technique. In other words... not only was the current version he was cultivating correct, it was even more perfect than the ‘authentic’ version in the box.

To Zhang Xuan, it didn’t matter how flawed a book was. As long as it contained content that would contribute to the compilation of a perfected Heaven’s Path manual, it would be useful to him.

Compile!

Zhang Xuan muttered as he compiled the two versions of Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body together before browsing through it once more.

With a swift glance, his eyes lit up.

It seems like I will be able to cultivate the Third Incandescence very soon...

Of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body he had compiled previously, with the exception of the First Incandescence, he required certain items to serve as a catalyst for him to cultivate the subsequent levels.

The Second Incandescence required the Earth Flame Heart whereas the Third Incandescence required the Origin Heavy Water.

He had learned the price of the Origin Heavy Water by eavesdropping on Hu Yaoyao's conversation. A bottle of it cost ten high-tier spirit stones, and he would require at least ten of them to successfully cultivate the Third Incandescence.

In other words, he would require a hundred high-tier spirit stones for it!

He didn't have the money for that, so he had been putting off the issue so far. However, after compiling the 'authentic' version of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body along with the one he currently had, even though he still required Origin Heavy Water to cultivate the Third Incandescence, the quantity required had decreased significantly.

From the initial ten bottles, he only needed one now!

“There are some changes to the Fourth Incandescence and Fifth Incandescence as well...”

While the 'authentic' version of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body wasn't able to resolve the remaining flaws contained in his current version, it did help to alleviate it by reducing the amount of each item required to cultivate the subsequent levels.

It seems like Wu Yangzi was still wary of the Otherworldly Demons after all... Zhang Xuan thought as he kept the manual into his storage ring.

It was fortunate that he had borrowed physical body cultivation technique manuals from Luo Qiqi, resolved its flaws, and imparted the correct version to Luo Qiqi. Otherwise, her cultivation might have very well gone berserk.

But thinking about it, Wu Yangzi didn't have any other choice but to remain wary either.

Surrounded by Otherworldly Demons, how could he possibly dare to leave behind a manual of his secret art without any reservations? If the Otherworldly Demon were to obtain his Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body and use it against mankind, wouldn't he become a huge sinner?

“The final treasure I have left behind is also the most important one of all. It is due to my possession of this that the

Otherworldly Demonic Tribe had set their eyes on me. If you are an ordinary cultivator, I hope that you can hand it over to the Master Teacher Pavilion, and if you are a master teacher, I hope that you can deal with it carefully. Make sure that it doesn't fall into malicious hands..." the voice spoke grimly.

"Hand it over to the Master Teacher Pavilion?" Zhang Xuan muttered in confusion as he took out the remaining item in the box.

Taking a closer look, it was a piece of goatskin with countless years of history behind it. Resembling a map, it had many labels written in bizarre characters which he had never seen before.

"What is this?" Zhang Xuan muttered as he tried to analyze it with the Library of Heaven's Path.

While he did manage to compile a book on the map, it only contained details regarding the fabric used. The bizarre characters on it which seemed to be landmark labels on the map didn't have any flaws, so they were reflected how they originally were in the book.

Unable to derive anything conclusive from the map, Zhang Xuan could only keep the goatskin into his storage ring.

Even though he couldn't tell what the map was for, given how careful Wu Yangzi was with it and that the Otherworldly Demons were dying to lay their hands on it, it was definitely an extremely important artifact.

"If my descendants are still around, I hope that you can treat them kindly. The greatest regret of my life is to have implicated them in the mess that I got involved with..." After introducing the three treasures, the voice continued speaking in a melancholic tone.

Zhang Xuan could sense Wu Yangzi's conflicted emotions when he was recording this message. The latter seemed to have known that his possession of the map would result in his enemies going after his family as well, but standing in between the welfare of his family and mankind, he had no choice but to choose the latter.

“Don’t worry, your descendant is currently my apprentice. I will take care of her well!” Zhang Xuan promised solemnly.

He had initially taken in Hu Yaoyao as his apprentice to uncover the location of Wu Yangzi’s old residence, but after learning of the sacrifices that Wu Yangzi had made for mankind, he felt obliged to repay the favor to Hu Yaoyao.

Even if he didn’t accept her as his direct disciple, he would at least acknowledge her as his official student and offer her some guidance in her cultivation and supporting occupations.

“Thank you!” As if responding to Zhang Xuan’s words, the voice spoke these two final words before the whirring of the mechanism faded into silence.

There are two problems that I will have to address now. First, what is the map for? Second, why does the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe hope to lay their hands on it for? Zhang Xuan thought as he rubbed his glabella.

Hu Yaoyao’s concealment of her heritage and Wu Yangzi’s wariness, these seemed to be telling him that Hongyuan City wasn’t as safe as it seemed.

Wait, perhaps Vicious might know a thing or two about it... Such a thought suddenly surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s mind.

The map seemed to be an extremely old relic, and Vicious had lived since the ancient times. Perhaps, he might be able to read those words on the map and deduce what it was for.

Just as he was about to bring Vicious and his clone out from the Myriad Anthive Nest, he suddenly sensed something, and his eyebrows shot up. In the next moment, he saw a beautiful silhouette flitting through the night, headed in his direction.

[1] (Zi hour: 2300~0100)

853 Banque

She was Luo Qiqi.

Upon seeing her, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. He quickly sent a telepathic message to her. "You came at a good time! I have found Elder Wu Yangzi's treasure!"

Flicking his wrist, he took out the metal box and the three artifacts.

Since he had received Wu Yangzi's heritage along with Luo Qiqi, and the latter was Wu Yangzi's direct disciple at that, she had the right to know what the treasures were and share possession of them as well.

"You've found it?" Stunned, Luo Qiqi turned her sight to the items in Zhang Xuan's hands.

Luo Qiqi widened her eyes in disbelief. "This is... Black Goldcrystal Ore?"

"You recognize it?" Zhang Xuan asked.

Due to the sheer rarity of Black Goldcrystal Ore, he had never seen it in person before, only learning of its existence from the books. It was due to Wu Yangzi's explanation that he was able to confirm its identity before using the Library of Heaven's Path, and yet, Luo Qiqi actually recognized it with a single glance. Could it be that her eye of discernment was beyond his?

One must know that even though he might not be the most capable blacksmith in Hongyuan Empire, he was definitely the most knowledgeable one. Even Zhao Bingxu, the head of the Blacksmith School, was far from a match for him in terms of knowledge.

"I have seen some before. However, the piece I saw was only the size of a walnut, and the price was already astronomical. Considering the size of this one, I can hardly even imagine how much it is worth," Luo Qiqi exclaimed.

“You have seen Black Goldcrystal Ore before?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Even if the piece she had seen was just the size of a walnut, it was sufficient to show that her background was anything but ordinary.

“Un!” Luo Qiqi nodded. After which, she turned her sights to the other two objects, and upon seeing the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body, she nodded in realization.

“You should take the authentic manual for now. I will help to alter it to suit your constitution better when I have the time!”

After passing the correct Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body over to the other party, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze to the map and asked, “Do you happen to recognize the words on this map?”

Luo Qiqi shook her head. “I have never seen such words before.”

“I see... Allow me to keep the map for the time being then. Once I figure out what the map means, I will get back to you and bring you there,” Zhang Xuan said.

“As for the Black Goldcrystal Ore, I will try to find a way to melt it to forge a weapon for you.”

“Thank you, teacher!” Luo Qiqi nodded in gratitude.

Each of the three items was incredibly valuable, but her teacher didn't hide them from her and take them for himself. That said a great amount about his character.

At this moment, Luo Qiqi finally recalled her aim for coming over, and she hurriedly said, “Oh right, teacher, I am here to invite you to the banquet at the royal palace...”

Yu Fei-er had invited her, Zhang Xuan, Xing Yuan, and the others to the banquet in the royal palace. Knowing Zhang Xuan's personality, she knew that he might attempt to skip the banquet, and she had also heard the news about his manor collapsing as well, so she specially made the journey here to take a look.

Knowing that he had to make the trip to the royal palace to take a look at the Bodhi Saint Tree, Zhang Xuan nodded. “Let’s go.”

Leaving the rubble of the manor, the duo got onto a carriage that Luo Qiqi had prepared beforehand and headed to the royal palace.

It didn’t take them too long to arrive at their destination.

Befitting of its status as the center of authority of a Tier-1 Empire, Hongyuan Empire’s royal palace was enormous. Before the towering gates stood two rows of guards, every single one of them possessing the cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 6-dan Cosmos Bridge realm. With several hundreds of them gathered in a spot, their presence exerted a huge pressure on those walking between them.

Stepping through the palace gates, Zhang Xuan noticed all kinds of formations in the area, and even the weakest of them was a grade-6 primary formation. Those who were unfamiliar with the layout of the royal palace would swiftly find themselves trapped within a labyrinth, unable to escape.

With traps potentially springing on one with each step, not even a Saint realm 1-dan expert would dare to casually step into the royal palace.

Handing over their invitation letters, a guard led them around the royal palace, and soon, they were standing before a huge palace.

“This is the place where the banquet is held,” Luo Qiqi said.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan suddenly recalled this matter and asked, “Right, I forgot to ask. What is the occasion today? Why are we invited to the banquet?”

Even the royal family couldn’t possibly hold such a grand banquet for no good reason.

“You don’t know?” Seeing how her teacher came here without even knowing anything at all, Luo Qiqi was rendered speechless.

“You were also there when Yu Fei-er handed me the invitation letter. She didn’t tell me anything, so how could I possibly know?” Zhang Xuan replied in bewilderment.

“...” Luo Qiqi slapped her forehead and shook her head.

Her teacher was a person of great capability, but his emotional quotient was truly lacking.

An esteemed princess of the empire invited you to a banquet; the least you could do was to ask around, find out what the occasion is beforehand, and make preparations accordingly! After all, this is the monarchy of an empire we are talking about! But this... if I hadn’t gone to the manor to bring you over, would you still be loitering around the rubble, at a loss of what to do?

“Today is Yu Fei-er’s... birthday banquet!” Luo Qiqi said.

“His Majesty has invited the young talents from all over the empire along with her good friends to celebrate this occasion!”

“Birthday banquet?” Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan’s eyelids began twitching.

“That’s right. Don’t tell me that you didn’t even prepare a present?” Luo Qiqi stared at her teacher with a frustrated look.

“Am I supposed to prepare one?” Zhang Xuan returned her a blank stare.

None of you told me that it would be a birthday banquet, how was I supposed to know that I had to prepare a present?

I don’t even know what an appropriate gift for a lady would be; how am I supposed to pick one out for her? Besides, I have been busy the entire day, so I wouldn’t have had the time to find one either.

“You...” Luo Qiqi shook her head, not knowing what she could say to enlighten that blockhead of a teacher she had.

Even if you didn’t know that it is Yu Fei-er’s birthday, that is a personal invitation from the emperor that you have over there. Shouldn’t you prepare some gifts to at least avoid leaving an unfavorable impression? To arrive empty-handed... you are probably the only one who dares do such a thing!

“Forget it. I have some items here; you can make do with them for the moment...”

Flicking her wrist, Luo Qiqi took out a few items that most ladies would fancy.

There was a massive pearl, a hair ornament embedded with precious gems, a fragrance pouch with a unique aroma... They were all fairly expensive accessories.

“It’s fine! If it comes down to it, I will just leave the banquet. Don’t worry about it!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

In the first place, he wasn’t really interested in the banquet. The main reason he wanted to come to the royal palace was to take a look at the Bodhi Saint Tree and see if it could be used to save Wei Ruyan. If he was going to be snubbed for not bringing a present, there didn’t seem much point remaining at the banquet then.

“Leave the banquet?” Luo Qiqi frowned, but seeing the serious look on her teacher’s face, she could only give up on persuading him otherwise. “Alright then...”

As close friends, she knew Yu Fei-er’s personality and temper very well. The latter wasn’t one to care about gifts. As long as Zhang Shi was present at her birthday banquet, she would be satisfied.

Thus, the both of them stepped into the palace and began making their way over to the main hall.

The corridor linking the entrance of the palace to the main hall had a particularly tall ceiling that made one feel minuscule in comparison. There were various extravagant ornaments placed along the corridor, which gave it a dignified and regal air. A thick red mat around half a chi thick stretched from the entrance of the palace all the way to the main hall. There was a pleasantly soft and springy sensation stepping on it.

Activating his Eye of Insight discreetly, Zhang Xuan took a brief look into the main hall. To his astonishment, he saw countless formations laid out inside the main hall. Some were for defensive purposes and some were for offensive purposes,

but most of them were for the sole purpose of fortifying the room.

Grade-6 pinnacle Stabilization Formation, grade-6 pinnacle Grand Monolith Formation, grade-6 pinnacle Castle Fortification Formation... Why would the main hall of the royal palace require so many Fortification Formations? Zhang Xuan wondered in bewilderment.

As the center of Hongyuan Empire, the royal palace was constructed by the most capable of craftsmen, so there was little to question about its stability. It wouldn't collapse even in the face of a massive earthquake, so it was baffling to see so many Fortification Formations in the room.

Forget it, it's not like it's any of my business anyway... Zhang Xuan shook the thought out of his head, deciding not to think deeper into it.

He was only there to attend the banquet, so the formations in the area shouldn't matter to him.

"Qiqi, Zhang shi, you are here!" Just as they were standing before the entrance of the main hall, they suddenly saw Xing Yuan and Wu Zhen walking over.

They were dressed in brand-new master teacher robes, and it seemed like they had specially dressed themselves up for the occasion. There was an air of nobility around them, and they seemed extraordinarily spirited.

"Has the banquet begun yet?" Luo Qiqi asked.

"Not yet. Not all of the guests have arrived yet," Xing Yuan said with a smile.

Hearing that, Luo Qiqi heaved a sigh of relief. "That's good!"

As an entire group, the four of them stepped into the main hall.

The main hall was around eight hundred square meters large, and it was supported only by the four pillars at the corners. There were countless Night Illumination Pearls embedded in the tall ceiling, making the hall brightly lit as if it was day.

After taking a seat, Zhang Xuan took another look around the room and noticed that there were eight elegantly-dressed

young men in their twenties already in the hall.

Judging from their movements and gestures, they seemed to be from the upper society.

“These are the offspring of the empire’s nobility,” Xing Yuan informed Zhang Xuan through zhenqi telepathy.

Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

He had expected such a sight when he learned that it was a birthday banquet earlier on.

Most likely, the emperor had invited those young men in order to pick out a suitable husband for Yu Fei-er.

With the extended lifespan that Transcendent Mortal cultivators possessed, it was uncommon for cultivators to marry in their twenties. However, Yu Fei-er’s marriage had political implications. If she could bring in a powerful ally to the royal family earlier on, it could help to further affirm the royal authority.

Even though most of these youths weren’t students of the Master Teacher Academy, they possessed extraordinary strength. The strongest of them had a cultivation equaling Hu Yaoyao and the others’, Chrysalis realm pinnacle, a single step away from reaching Half-Saint.

To possess such capability in their twenties, they could be considered top-notch geniuses even when placed against the students of the Master Teacher Academy.

“Xing Yuan, you seem to have quite a few competitors here?” Luo Qiqi teased.

As his good friend, she knew that Xing Yuan was interested in Yu Fei-er and had been courting her for some time. However, it was a pity that the latter didn’t reciprocate his feelings.

“This...”

Xing Yuan’s face reddened as he subconsciously shot a glance toward Zhang Xuan. With an awkward smile, he said, “I know that I am not good enough for Yu Fei-er, so I have already given up those thoughts...”

He did like Yu Fei-er, but the latter was uninterested in him. On the other hand, she seemed to possess some inexplicable feelings for Zhang Shi. After some consideration, he felt that it would be better for him to give up on this futile pursuit.

Putting aside the fact that Zhang Xuan had saved all of them, his accomplishments in the Master Teacher Academy were also not something he could ever hope to match.

On top of that, the other party was also the respected leader of the powerful Xuanxuan Faction.

If he really were to attempt to compete with the other party, he just might end up making enemies out of several tens of thousands of students in the Master Teacher Academy as well. How could he possibly match that?

“I advised you to give up long ago, but you just wouldn’t listen. Well, it’s still good to see you getting over it,” Luo Qiqi replied.

She knew very well how her close friend viewed Xing Yuan, so she had tried to advise him on the matter several times privately, but the latter had refused to listen.

He might have already spent many years courting Yu Fei-er, but it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing for him to give up on it now.

“Xing Yuan, the two people beside you look unfamiliar. Why don’t you introduce them to me?”

Just as they were speaking, they were interrupted by a masculine voice. Following which, a smiling young man in his mid-twenties walked over with a wine glass in his hands.

That young man had eyes as sharp as lightning, and he carried a dignified disposition fitting of nobility, which seemed to further accentuate his good looks.

Of the youths gathered at the banquet, he was the strongest of them all, possessing a cultivation of Chrysalis realm pinnacle.

854 Shen Jun

“It’s Young Master Shen Jun, I see...”

Upon seeing the other party, Xing Yuan’s face darkened in displeasure. Nevertheless, he still made the introduction.

“They are students from the Master Teacher Academy as well, the schoolmates of Princess Yu Fei-er. He is Zhang shi, and she is Luo shi!”

“So, it’s Zhang shi and Luo shi! Pleased to meet you, I am Shen Jun!” The young man clasped his fist and greeted them before raising his wine glass to offer a toast and drinking it in advance.

Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi also raised their wine glasses and drank in reciprocation.

“That young man is Shen Jun, the young master of the Shen Clan, one of the Four Great Clans of Hongyuan Empire. Young and talented, he has contributed greatly to the royal court and was conferred the position of a general of the empire. He is currently Xing Yuan’s greatest rival, and in their past clashes, Xing Yuan has suffered a fair bit due to him,” Wu Zhen discreetly informed Zhang Xuan after noticing the confused look on his face.

“Four Great Clans?” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Un. Other than the royal family, the strongest powers in Hongyuan Empire are the Four Great Clans. Those clans either possess great influence in the royal court or command numerous experts, so even the royal family has to tread carefully around them. Other than the Shen Clan, there is also the Xing Clan, which Xing Yuan is from, my Wu Clan, and the Liu Clan. In terms of standing, the Shen Clan is first, and following closely behind is the Xing Clan, and finally the Liu Clan and the Wu Clan,” Wu Zhen said.

Hearing that Wu Zhen was from the Four Great Clans too, Zhang Xuan was astonished. “So, you are an offspring of the

Four Great Clans?”

There seemed to be a huge difference between Xing Yuan and Wu Zhen in terms of their disposition and their wealth, so he had always thought that Wu Zhen had come from a humble background.

“I am an offspring from the branch family of the clan, so my standing is different from an offspring of the main family like Xing Yuan,” Wu Zhen explained awkwardly.

Bloodline was viewed to be of the utmost importance in the succession of large clans, resulting in a vast difference in the standing between that of the main family and the branch family.

For one, just because Xing Yuan was from the main family, he had a high standing in the clan, and the clan devoted many resources to grooming him.

...

Wu Zhen and Zhang Xuan had communicated telepathically, so even though their exchange was lengthy, it had taken up only a brief moment.

After Shen Jun put down his wine glass, he turned to Xing Yuan and smiled. “I have a request to ask of you all, but I am not sure if it is appropriate to raise it.”

“Since you aren’t sure whether it is appropriate to raise it or not, you might as well keep quiet.”

Seemingly aware of what Shen Jun was going to say, Xing Yuan shot him down flatly.

However. Shen Jun disregarded Xing Yuan’s words as if the latter was only throwing a tantrum and said, “From the moment I met the Sixth Princess when I was twelve, I knew that she would become my life goal. In order to become worthy of her, I have worked hard to achieve the standing and strength I possess today. As master teachers, you should be able to tell how much effort I have put in over the years. Even so, the thought of giving up has never crossed my mind. I knew that this was all necessary if I wanted to be qualified to stand beside her one day...”

The topic of his speech was his past history with Yu Fei-er, and the feelings he harbored for her.

Upon hearing those words, Xing Yuan's face turned livid.

Even though he had made up his mind to give up on courting Yu Fei-er, how could he let go of those emotions that he had held dearly for many years? To confess his love to Yu Fei-er before him, it was clear that Shen Jun was trying to humiliate him.

After introducing his history, Shen Jun requested with a smile, "... Thus, I intend to propose to take the Sixth Princess's hand before His Majesty later on, so I would be honored if you can speak on my behalf when that time comes."

"Speak on your behalf? Dream on!" With his teeth clenched tight, Xing Yuan looked as if he was going to explode at any moment.

"Now now, there is no need for you to get mad. I didn't expect to count on you in the first place!" Shen Jun chuckled lightly in response to Xing Yuan's rage.

Turning his gaze to Zhang Xuan and Luo Qiqi, he continued, "I hope that the both of you can help me with this matter... Putting aside that, I do hope to become friends with you two. Here is a token of sincerity from me, I hope that you can accept it!"

After saying those words, Shen Jun raised his hand and beckoned, and a young man walked up from behind. With a flick of his wrist, he took out two jade boxes and placed them on the table.

Opening the box, spiritual energy immediately gushed into the air, bringing a refreshing breeze to everyone's face.

Astonishingly, there were two high-tier spirit stones in each box.

To gift them two high-tier spirit stones each on their first meeting, Shen Jun sure was generous.

However, this also reflected how extreme his means were. There were no cultivators who could possibly reject high-tier spirit stones, but if they were to accept them, they would no

longer be in a good position to voice their objections to Shen Jun's proposal.

As expected of the young master of the Shen Clan, he sure knew how to deal with people.

“You are giving us four high-tier spirit stones to speak up on your behalf? Young Master Shen sure is generous! Qiqi, since he has offered them to us, it would be impolite for us to turn him down. Take them!” Zhang Xuan replied enthusiastically with a smile.

Four high-tier spirit stone was a huge sum of money. It would be a huge waste not to take them, especially since the other party was giving them to him for free.

“Yes!”

Luo Qiqi, of course, knew that her teacher was not one to fall for such cheap trickery like that. Thus, she stepped forward and stowed the high-tier spirit stones into her storage ring without any hesitation.

Shen Jun's mouth twitched for an instant before he swiftly covered it up naturally with a chuckle. “Haha, Brother Zhang sure is a straightforward man. We will definitely get along well!”

His address toward Zhang Xuan had changed from ‘Zhang shi’ to ‘Brother Zhang’, as if to symbolize how close they were, and he shot a provocative glance toward Xing Yuan before returning to his seat.

Truthfully, Shen Jun also didn't expect that Zhang Xuan would actually accept the four high-tier spirit stones. After all, his loyalty to Xing Yuan was on the line here.

“Zhang shi...” Xing Yuan panicked after seeing Zhang shi accept Shen Jun's high-tier spirit stones despite the latter's provocation.

In response to Xing Yuan's anxiety, Zhang Xuan calmly pointed out, “There is no need to worry. After all the time you have spent with Yu Fei-er, do you think that she is the sort of person to bend to mere words?”

“This...” Those words washed away Xing Yuan’s doubts in an instant.

If the lady he was interested in could be easily moved with words, he wouldn’t have been unsuccessful despite years of effort.

Yu Fei-er was a person with her own thoughts, and she was extremely obstinate about them. Once she had made a decision, even a hundred bulls couldn’t hope to reverse it.

It was also due to this obstinacy that she would rather serve as Zhang Shi’s maid than accept Xing Yuan’s goodwill.

How could a person with such a personality be moved by mere words?

“Since our words won’t sway Yu Fei-er’s decision, why should we reject a free gift that he offered us?” Zhang Xuan flashed him a meaningful smile. “Besides, even if to an offspring of the Shen Clan’s main family, I believe that four high-tier spirit stones should still a huge sum.”

“This...” Xing Yuan’s eyes widened as realization struck him.

His Xing Clan didn’t pale too much compared to the Shen Clan, and his standing in the Xing Clan was also nearly equivalent to Shen Jun’s.

Considering how it was difficult for him to access the high-tier spirit stones of the clan with his current standing, even with Shen Jun’s higher cultivation realm, it was unlikely that his plight would be much better than his own...

This meant that despite the generous exterior that Shen Jun had put up, his heart was probably bleeding when Luo Qiqi stowed the four high-tier spirit stones into her storage ring.

Most likely, Shen Jun was just making use of this opportunity to humiliate Xing Yuan and sow discord among them, but who could have known that Zhang Xuan would shamelessly accept his spirit stones...

Shen Jun had already said that those spirit stones were for them, and as the young master of the Shen Clan, he would be a laughingstock of the city if he were to go back on his word...

To watch four high-tier spirit stones being taken away right before his eyes and not being able to do anything about it, he must be tempted to rip his hair off in frustration at this very instant!

Having understood all of this, Xing Yuan's eyes lit up, and the negative emotions he had accumulated from the encounter with Shen Jun earlier dissipated without a trace.

Turning his eyes to Zhang Shi once more, he couldn't help but feel deep respect and admiration for the other party.

And the truth was that Zhang Xuan was right. Young Master Shen's heart was indeed bleeding at this very instant.

He had taken out those four high-tier spirit stones to oppress Xing Yuan, but who would have thought that the other party would be so shameless as to accept them...

Furthermore, the other party accepted them so candidly, without the slightest hint of hesitation at all.

Are you sure you are Xing Yuan's friends?

Where did your loyalty to your friends go?

Right after Shen Jun returned to his seat, a young man before him secretly sent a telepathic message to ask, "Brother Shen, who is that fellow?"

The young man was an offspring of the Liu Clan, one of the Four Great Clans as well.

Shen Jun harrumphed coldly. "A greedy fellow!"

"Greedy?" Liu Gongzi was baffled by Shen Jun's response.

Judging from the 'greedy fellow's' clothes, the other party seemed to be a master teacher.

Aren't master teachers upright and incorruptible? How can he be greedy then?

...

The encounter with Shen Jun was only a small incident, so Zhang Xuan didn't pay much heed to it. At this moment, his attention was focused on uncovering the details of the Bodhi

Saint Tree and determining if it would be effective at healing Wei Ruyan's soul.

Thus, he turned to Xing Yuan and asked, "I heard that there is a Bodhi Saint Tree in the royal palace that has the effect of nourishing one's soul. Is that true?"

"Bodhi Saint Tree? Now you mention it, I think I have heard of such a matter before!" Xing Yuan nodded.

As the offspring of the Four Great Clans, he was privy to some of the deep secrets in the royal palace.

Hearing that Xing Yuan knew of its existence, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up as he continued his questioning. "Then, do you know where in the royal palace it is located?"

"If I recall correctly, it should be in the emperor's sleeping chamber," Xing Yuan said. "This is a secret of the royal family, so I am not really sure about it either."

If it had been someone else, there was no way Xing Yuan would have revealed these secrets so easily. However, he was indebted to Zhang Xuan for saving his life, and he believed in the latter's integrity as well.

"Sleeping chamber?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He wasn't too sure where the emperor's sleeping chamber was, but it shouldn't be too difficult for him to find it if he were to search thoroughly.

The emperor's sleeping chamber must be in the location filled with powerful defensive formations and patrols in order to ward away assassins. As long as he moved in that direction, he should have no problem finding it.

I have to find an opportunity for my soul to slip away and take a look around, Zhang Xuan thought.

Given his current cultivation, it would be impossible for him to slip under the radar of the experts in the royal palace and find the emperor's sleeping chamber, unless he were to move as a soul.

With the intangible property of a soul, as long as he didn't encounter any Saint realm experts specializing in the study of

souls, he should be able to avoid detection.

With this thought in mind, Zhang Xuan turned to ask the young lady seated beside him, “Qiqi, when does the banquet start?”

Luo Qiqi took a look around the surroundings before replying. “Not all of the guests have gathered yet, so I would estimate... around an hour!”

“That’s plenty of time. I just had a sudden spurt of inspiration, so I would like to cultivate for a moment. Stand guard for me, don’t let anyone interrupt me!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“You want to cultivate here?” Luo Qiqi widened her eyes in shock.

We are at a banquet, a place where people drink, sing, and make merry... and you want to cultivate?

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Alright then...” Hearing those words, Luo Qiqi couldn’t help but feel awed by her teacher.

With his diligence, it was no wonder her teacher was able to improve so swiftly. There were very few who could go to this extent.

“Thank you.”

Closing his eyes, Zhang Xuan slipped his soul out of his body.

Having studied both demonic tunes and terpsichorean arts, his understanding of souls had deepened. This had granted him the ability to better conceal the presence of his own soul, allowing him to slip away from the main hall without catching anyone’s attention.

After slipping out of the main hall, he didn’t dart around randomly to search aimlessly. Instead, he flew to a greater altitude and activated his Eye of Insight.

In an instant, the many formations set up throughout the royal palace appeared right before his eyes.

The place with the highest concentration of formations is there...

Soon, he narrowed down his search to a certain residence.

If it had been before, even in his soul state, he wouldn't have dared to venture into an area filled with grade-6 formations. However, after going through the books in the Formation Master School, there was currently no one in the territory of Hongyuan Empire who could match him in the field of formations. No matter how powerful or profound the formations in the royal palace might be, they were no different from unclothed ladies, their secrets lying bare for him to see.

After maneuvering skillfully around numerous sentries, mechanisms, and formations, he soon arrived at the residence.

855 Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Ar

Origin Convergence Formation?

Standing on the wall of the residence, Zhang Xuan frowned. A grade-7 formation?

This wasn't the largest residence within the entire royal palace, but it had the most formidable formation of all—a grade-7 formation.

A formation of that grade had already surpassed Hongyuan Empire's level.

It seems like that is the most important place in the royal palace. The Bodhi Saint Tree must be inside! A glint flashed through Zhang Xuan's eyes.

According to what Zhong Dingchun said, the Bodhi Saint Tree was the foundation to the royal family's power, so it must be very tightly-guarded. This residence met that requirement perfectly.

Whether it would be able to save Wei Ruyan or not, he would just have to enter and take a look for himself.

Zhang Xuan began studying the grade-7 formation with his Eye of Insight, but a moment later, he shook his head.

With my current cultivation, it will take quite some time to decipher a grade-7 formation...

It was possible for him to find the Life Gate and slip in discreetly without alarming anyone, but based on his estimations, he would need at least two hours to work it out.

Considering the dangers lurking within the royal palace and that the banquet would be starting in an hour's time, he couldn't afford to take that much time.

I have no choice then!

With a thought, Zhang Xuan used his soul energy to pick up a tree branch and toss it into the residence.

Weng!

Like a rock tossed into calm water, the formation immediately whirred into action, and a series of crisp sounds echoed throughout the area.

Countless swords flashed across the air, and in an instant, the tree branch was reduced to shreds.

It was a powerful Slaughter Formation!

In the moment that the formation activated, Zhang Xuan immediately muttered softly, "Flaws!"

The Library of Heaven's Path wasn't able to compile books on formations when they were in their dormant stage. Thus, he had to activate it before he could see the problems with it.

A book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path, and Zhang Xuan swiftly flipped through it.

After gaining an understanding of the formation, he immediately headed to the center of the formation and kicked it forcefully.

Hu!

The formation came to an immediate halt.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan hurriedly made his way into the residence.

Other than the Slaughter Formation set up outside, it didn't seem like there was anything special about the residence. Perhaps due to the banquet, there was not a person in sight. Zhang Xuan swiftly scanned the entire premises, but the Bodhi Saint Tree was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he found several ancient stone tablets.

Was I mistaken? Zhang Xuan frowned.

According to the information he had received from Zhong Dingchun, the Bodhi Saint Tree was likely to be of the utmost importance to the royal family. However, there was nothing

resembling a tree to be found in the courtyard... Perhaps, the safest place wasn't the most tightly-guarded place?

But assuming that was the case, why would a grade-7 formation be set up there?

In order to protect those stone tablets?

Or could it be that... those stone tablets were more valuable than the Bodhi Saint Tree?

Perplexed, Zhang Xuan headed to the closest stone tablet to take a closer look.

Judging from the severe wear and tear, the stone tablet was extremely old, possibly having existed for thousands of years. There were several large characters inscribed on it.

These words were unlike those of a painter; there wasn't any form of unique intent that could be felt from it. In fact, the handwriting was only an inch away from being classified as hideous. However, for some reason, just by looking at it, Zhang Xuan felt his soul being drawn in by some kind of inexplicable force.

Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art!

These large words were inscribed on the top of the first stone tablet.

Is this a soul cultivation technique? Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

It was well-known that the soul was the hardest to cultivate, and this was especially so after the soul oracles went extinct. It was significantly easier and more effective to cultivate one's zhenqi, so there were very few soul cultivators in the world. As such, there weren't many soul cultivation technique manuals existent in the world.

This was also the reason his soul had reached a bottleneck at Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle, unable to advance any further.

He had come to this residence thinking that he would find the Bodhi Saint Tree, but who could have known that he would stumble upon a soul cultivation technique instead!

That might not have been much to others since cultivating one's soul was an arduous process with disproportionate returns, but this was definitely a treasure to him.

He had received the Transcendent 1-dan to 9-dan cultivation techniques of the soul oracle from Mo Hunsheng, but there were many flaws in the later portions, making them unsuitable to be cultivated. Perhaps, with this Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art, he might be able to resolve those flaws.

“Flaws!” Zhang Xuan turned his sight to the stone tablet, and a book materialized in the Library of Heaven's Path.

After the previous experience at the Saint Ascension Platform, he knew that he could replicate written content into the Library of Heaven's Path through his sight even if it wasn't a book.

He quickly did the same for the other stone tablets before heaving a sigh of relief.

As he was still within the royal palace, and danger was lurking around him, this wasn't the place for him to process his newfound knowledge.

For the time being, he had to get out of the area as soon as possible.

However, just as he was about to leave the residence to continue his search for the Bodhi Saint Tree, a bellow suddenly reverberated across the room. “Who's there?”

Following which, an immense might came crushing toward his soul.

“This is bad!” Alarmed, Zhang Xuan hurriedly moved away, dodging the attack by a hair's breadth.

After which, he turned around and saw a middle-aged man staring at him intently.

The middle-aged man seemed to be in his mid-forties, and he was dressed in posh clothes. He harnessed a powerful aura, which commanded subservience from others.

In his eyes, Zhang Xuan could see vortices that seemed to reflect his existence.

An expert specializing in souls... Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed in alarm.

With a swift glance, he could tell that the other party, rather than really seeing him, was able to sense his presence, similar to Wei Ranxue back then.

It seemed like it wasn't for no reason that the royal family was able to maintain a tight grasp of power over a country as powerful as Hongyuan Empire. It was filled with experts who could fend off even the elusive soul oracles.

"Which brazen vermin dares to barge into the royal palace?" The middle-aged man harrumphed coldly as he sent a punch over.

An overwhelming might of a Saint 1-dan pinnacle swiftly tore through space to strike its target.

An expert of that caliber was indubitably ranked amid the top power tier in Hongyuan Empire.

"Flee!" Zhang Xuan immediately dove out of the residence decisively, knowing that he wouldn't be a match for the middle-aged man.

"Trying to flee? Do you think that the royal palace is a place where you can come and go as you please?" Sensing the presence hiding within the room attempting to flee, the middle-aged man's eyebrows shot up, and he swiftly raised his hand and grabbed firmly.

Hong long!

A huge palm print fell from the heaven, sealing all of Zhang Xuan's paths of escape.

He might not be able to see me, but having cultivated his soul, he is able to sense my presence... If this goes on, I might just lose my life here... Trapped, Zhang Xuan's soul tensed anxiously.

He was in far greater danger currently than when he had encountered Wei Ranxue previously.

At the very least, Wei Ranxue seemed to be trying to apprehend him for investigation back then, so she had held

back in her attacks. However, this middle-aged man had gone all out from the start, seemingly determined to vanquish him from the face of the world.

Considering that he was an ‘unidentified intruder’ in a seemingly important area of the royal palace at the current moment, it was natural that the other party would be uneasy.

Zhang Xuan swiftly moved to dodge the palm strike, but he was still nicked at the edge of his soul, inducing fiery pain upon him.

No, this won’t do. I won’t last long like this. But despite his anxiety, Zhang Xuan didn’t allow panic to cloud his rationality. Instead, he swiftly analyzed his current circumstances.

His soul cultivation was only at Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle, and against a Saint 1-dan pinnacle opponent, he couldn’t possibly hope to stand his ground.

But if all he did was evasive maneuvers, he would only be gradually worn thin and die.

A glint flashed across Zhang Xuan’s eyes as an idea surfaced in his head. The Slaughter Formation!

With his current strength, it would be impossible for him to defeat the other party. His only hope lay in the Origin Convergence Formation set up around the residence.

Having compiled a book on it in the Library of Heaven’s Path, he had gained a clear grasp of the formation’s layout and flaws. To escape, he would have to borrow the strength of the formation.

Having made up his mind, he immediately darted to the core of the formation. At the same time, the middle-aged man also sent another palm strike at him.

With his life on the line, Zhang Xuan dared not hesitate. He immediately kicked the core of the formation forcefully.
“Activate!”

Hong long!

The halted formation immediately came to life, and an abrupt burst of mist shrouded the middle-aged man in an instant.

This is my chance! Zhang Xuan thought as he quickly darted out of the residence.

Considering that the middle-aged man was able to enter the residence as well, it was likely that he was able to control the formation. In other words, it was only a matter of time before he disabled the formation and came after him.

Knowing that he had to get as much distance between him and the middle-aged man as possible, Zhang Xuan fled as fast as he could.

“Damn it!”

On the other hand, the middle-aged man didn't expect that the intruder would be able to control the formation as well, and he bellowed in frustration. By the time he stepped out of the formation, he was unable to detect the other party's presence anymore.

“Just what could it be?” Standing in the air above the residence, the middle-aged man pondered with a livid expression.

The content inscribed on the stone tablets was profound, and without proper guidance, it was impossible to comprehend it. As such, he didn't fear the soul cultivation technique being leaked out. However, to be able to enter the royal palace freely and even control their grade-7 formation... this was way too exaggerated!

Had he not sensed the formation in the residence being halted and come to investigate the matter, it was unlikely that the intruder would have been found at all.

“It seems like it's about time to step up the security of the royal palace...” the middle-aged man muttered.

Regardless of whether the intruder was a saint beast or a human, the only thing he could do now was augment the defenses of the royal palace and eliminate the intruder the next time he struck.

...

That was a close shave!

After fleeing some distance away from the residence, Zhang Xuan dove into a nearby building to conceal himself and decide on his next move.

He could easily see through the flaws of the formation in the building, so he was able to slip through them easily.

Having escaped so far, he should already be out of the other party's detection range by now, and he heaved a sigh of relief.

The royal palace of Hongyuan Empire sure was impressive. To think that there would be soul experts in the palace as well!

But giving the matter some thought, considering that the Bodhi Saint Tree had the ability to nourish souls, the members of the royal family should possess extraordinarily powerful souls. Paired with some soul techniques, even if they were still far from matching up to the soul oracles, they would still be an incredible force to reckon with.

It seemed like the search for the Bodhi Saint Tree wouldn't go smoothly after all.

Forget it, the banquet should be starting soon. It's about time for me to make my way back now.

With his presence exposed, it was likely that the royal palace would tighten its guard on the Bodhi Saint Tree. His safety would be compromised if he were to continue searching for it. Thus, after a moment of hesitation, he decided to return to the banquet for the time being.

In any case, Wei Ruyan's condition had been stabilized, so she wouldn't be in danger in the short term. There was no need for him to take such a huge risk at the moment.

Thus, he discreetly made his way up to the roof, stared at the countless resplendent buildings and residences that stretched all the way to the horizon, and scratched his head blankly.

So... where is the main hall again?

856 Advancement in Soul Cultivation

Fleeing frantically for his life, he did not have the luxury of choosing his path. Thus, he just moved according to his instincts, heading to wherever it brought him to.

To make things worse, the royal palace was massive, and there were many buildings that resembled one another. Staring at the countless buildings in the area, he couldn't help but fall into a daze.

To think that the esteemed Principal Zhang of the Master Teacher Academy... would actually get lost!

If he was in close proximity to his body, he might have still been able to sense it. However, putting aside the fact that he was quite a distance away at the moment, the royal palace was filled with formations and experts, resulting in a multitude of auras permeating the area, making it nigh impossible for him to sense his physical body.

Perhaps, he might be able to find his way around if he were to fly to a sufficiently high altitude, but after the previous incident, he knew that there were soul experts around the royal palace. With his presence made known, he couldn't guarantee that there weren't soul experts keeping a lookout over the airspace as well.

On top of that, the middle-aged man was likely still looking for him at the moment. He didn't have the confidence to be able to flee from the other party once more.

He had been able to catch the other party off-guard with the Slaughter Formation earlier, but such a trick was unlikely to work twice.

As long as I head in single direction persistently, I should be able to get out of the royal palace...

Unable to find his direction and daring not to fly high, Zhang Xuan could only resort to the most unsophisticated method in the book.

He had once heard that if a person found themselves lost inside a completely dark cave, the best way out was to continue advancing forward along the wall. No matter how deep the cave might be, one should eventually be able to find a way out.

This was the very method he had decided to employ. With all of the buildings identical to one another, if he were to attempt to return via his original route, putting aside the fact that he could very well bump into the middle-aged man once more, it was questionable whether he would be able to find the main hall or not.

Thus, the best option lying before him was to simply continue advancing in a single direction all the way to the end.

The royal palace was large, but he should eventually reach its end. Once he left the royal palace, he should be able to determine his location and find his way back to the palace entrance and the main hall.

Alright, this direction then! Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan decided on a direction and began to move.

As a soul, he could float over the walls easily. As long as he didn't go too high, it shouldn't be easy for the soul experts in the royal palace to sense him.

What was troublesome were the formations in the courtyard and the occasional patrols in the area, so he had to move carefully.

However, it was fortunate that he possessed the Eye of Insight, and the soul cultivation technique he cultivated was the Heaven's Path Soul Art too, allowing him to conceal his aura. Unless it was a Saint realm expert specializing in the study of souls, he should be able to bypass most patrols without an issue.

After passing by six residences, a bizarrely large residence suddenly appeared before him.

What is this place?

What had caught his eye about the residence was the immense Breath Isolation Formation set up around the area to conceal what was within.

Is there some kind of unspeakable secret concealed inside? Or... could it be that the Bodhi Saint Tree is in there?

The main purpose of the Breath Isolation Formation was to cast a barrier over the auras within, making it impossible for those outside to sense what was inside. For the ground to be protected by a Breath Isolation Formation instead of the usual defensive formations for the other residences, it seemed like there was something really important inside that the royal family was trying to hide.

Curious, Zhang Xuan slipped through the Breath Isolation Formation and began scanning the area.

This seems to be some kind of trial grounds. Am I already out of the palace?

The first thing he noticed was that there were many Strength Measuring Rock Pillars scattered throughout the courtyard, reminiscent of a training ground.

But the royal palace had its own barracks for soldiers to train at. Why would there be so many Strength Measuring Rock Pillars in this large residence?

Intrigued, Zhang Xuan wandered around the residence to take a look, and at the other end, he saw two walls lined side by side to form a narrow alley. Closing in, there seemed to be some sort of inscription on two walls.

“There are seven conventional ways that one can cultivate one’s soul. First, conception of intention. Second, facing one’s negative emotions. Third...”

There were various pieces of knowledge concerning the soul written on the two walls.

These are the bare basics to soul cultivation? Zhang Xuan thought.

The content contained on the walls was extremely simplistic, involving only the very basics of soul cultivation. It couldn't even be compared to the Soul Guiding Method, which he had learned from Mo Hunsheng back then.

They were only useful to Consonant Spirit realm cultivators, who had just barely begun to start cultivating their souls.

The inscriptions extended from one end of the wall to the other. Reading on, Zhang Xuan began to inch deeper into the alley.

It seems like the cultivation techniques here are slightly more profound, Zhang Xuan remarked.

The knowledge contained on the portion of the wall deeper into the alley was slightly more profound than what he had read earlier on. Even though they still paled greatly in comparison to the cultivation techniques of the soul oracles, there was no doubt that they did have the effect of enhancing one's soul energy if practiced diligently.

Staring into the depths of the long alley, Zhang Xuan curiously wondered, Does the content get more and more profound the further one proceeds into the alley?

Taking a few more steps in, he realized that the content became even more profound yet again. Perhaps, if he were to travel deep enough, the knowledge there could help to resolve the flaws existing in his Heaven's Path Soul Art!

I still have some time before the banquet begins... Let's do it then!

So far, it had only been ten minutes since he had left the main hall. He could still afford to explore a little longer.

Thus, he proceeded forward.

The content on the walls did get more and more profound the further he progressed. Even though it was still useless to him, it was at the level where an ordinary cultivator would consider it as a treasure.

Hmm? Why do I feel a slight pressure on my soul?

Proceeding slightly deeper, just as the end was in sight, he suddenly realized that there was some kind of force in his surroundings exerting pressure on his soul.

However, it was extremely weak. If he wasn't paying any notice to it, he wouldn't have even felt it.

Regardless of what it is, I should finish reading through the content on the walls first!

Knowing that there were profound soul cultivation techniques ahead of him, Zhang Xuan proceeded forward without any hesitation.

To him, the number of flaws in a soul cultivation technique didn't matter. As long as he could gather a sufficient number of them to form a Heaven's Path Soul Art, that would be enough. Thus, he took in all of the inscriptions on the wall without discriminating among them.

Wherever his gaze fell, the writings inscribed in the area would appear in the Library of Heaven's Path in the form of a book.

By the time he reached the end of the alley, the complexity of the cultivation technique was already nearing the level of the Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art. It still wasn't particularly profound, but at the very least, it wasn't as unseemly as those he had seen earlier on.

At this point, the truth finally dawned on Zhang Xuan. From the basics to the advanced, this should be an area where the offspring of the royal family cultivate their soul...

The content at the very start of the alley was aimed at those who had just started cultivating their souls, and the profoundness deepened gradually the further one advanced. At the very end, the knowledge had begun to overlap with the stone tablets he had seen earlier.

Those who had reached this point should have already achieved a deep understanding of souls, not to his level perhaps, but at least on par with the middle-aged man he had encountered earlier.

Considering that these were valuable and rare soul cultivation techniques, it was no wonder the stone tablets he had encountered earlier were guarded by a grade-7 Slaughter Formation, and this residence was concealed by a Breath Isolation Formation.

After reading the final writing on the wall, Zhang Xuan shook his head in disappointment. But still, these soul cultivation techniques are still far too basic...

Ordinary cultivators might find these soul cultivation techniques profound, but as one who had inherited the heritage of the soul oracles, they were still too basic.

To make an analogy, it was like a college student taking on a junior school student's work.

Nevertheless, one thing praiseworthy about it was that even though the cultivation techniques were simple, they were well-structured and complete, and it was definitely possible to cultivate a powerful soul expert through it.

It must have taken the royal family quite a lot of effort to gather and organize this.

Turning his gaze away from the walls, Zhang Xuan saw an average-sized round door at the end of the alley. Seemingly fortified by some kind of power, it stood tightly-shut.

He moved over to the door and attempted to push it open, only to find that it wouldn't budge.

Humph! With a frown, Zhang Xuan gathered his soul energy and pushed forcefully.

Kacha!

The round door was blasted open, revealing a vast hall ahead.

Curious, Zhang Xuan moved into the hall.

Hong long!

As soon as Zhang Xuan entered the premises, he immediately felt a massive force crushing down on his soul, threatening to tear it apart.

Humph!

Zhang Xuan immediately drove his Heaven's Path Soul Art and a golden glow rippled across his soul, significantly reducing the pressure exerted on him.

With his discomfort alleviated, he began to scan the room, and he swiftly found the culprit behind the crushing force on his soul—four glowing statues.

The statues were tall and powerfully-built. Two wielded swords while the remaining two wielded massive sabers. They emanated a powerful aura around them that exerted a huge pressure on those who entered the room. Those who were lacking in their soul cultivation might just find their souls dissipating in the face of that immense force.

One thing that Zhang Xuan swiftly noted about the hall after his recovery was that the spiritual energy in the area was extremely concentrated, to the point that it was nearly tangible. It was similar to the sensation he had felt when he first entered the Lake Eye of the Cleansing Lake.

Wait... This spiritual energy has the property of nourishing souls? Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up in excitement.

As souls tended to be more fragile compared to physical bodies, they needed to be nourished by more soothing spiritual energy. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been so troubled over Wei Ruyan's illness.

But while this spiritual energy can nourish souls, given that Wei Ruyan is still unconscious at the moment, even if I were to bring her here, she wouldn't be able to absorb it either...

While the spiritual energy had the ability to nourish souls, Wei Ruyan couldn't absorb and assimilate it into her soul given her lack of consciousness. This was also the reason why Zhang Xuan eventually chose to transfer her soul to a saint herb to nourish it.

But while she is unable to do so, I can. If I can strengthen my soul before treating her, I will be able to raise my chances of saving her!

With a stronger soul, he would be able to utilize his means as a soul oracle more effectively, which would be vital in rousing

Wei Ruyan's consciousness.

I should first see if I can compile the subsequent levels of the Heaven's Path Soul Art first... With such a thought in mind, Zhang Xuan immersed his consciousness into the Library of Heaven's Path.

Compile!

With a silent command, he compiled the soul oracle cultivation technique he had obtained from Mo Hunsheng with the numerous books that he had just collected.

Flipping it open, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up. A perfect Ethereal Treading realm Heaven's Path Soul Art...

By compiling the Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art and the other soul cultivation techniques here along with Mo Hunsheng's soul oracle cultivation technique, he had successfully produced the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Heaven's Path Soul Art!

With a dense concentration of spiritual energy optimized for a soul's absorption in the area, this was a good opportunity for him to raise his soul cultivation from Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle. Thus, without any hesitation, he immediately sat down.

Driving the Ethereal Treading realm Heaven's Path Soul Art, his massive soul seemed to have turned into a Spirit Gathering Formation in an instant. The surrounding spiritual energy was swiftly drawn around him and disappeared into his soul.

Gugugugu!

Zhang Xuan's soul cultivation swiftly rose.

Hong long!

Before long, with a crisp echo, he had managed to achieve a breakthrough to Ethereal Treading realm.

Ethereal Treading realm intermediate stage.

Ethereal Treading realm advanced stage.

Ethereal Treading realm pinnacle!

Half an hour later, his cultivation had already reached Ethereal Treading realm pinnacle, and his strength rose to 20,000,000 ding!

Great!

With the breakthrough in his soul cultivation, his analytical ability had been enhanced, and his spirit had grown even more lively. By the time he looked at his surroundings once more, he realized that he had devoured nearly all of the spiritual energy in the room.

The four statues before him had also lost their glow, seemingly on the verge of breaking apart after being deprived of their energy source.

857 Who Is the Principal?

In Hongyuan royal palace, two young men dressed in lavish clothing were walking side by side.

Both of them seemed to be in their early twenties, and their cultivation was both at Perfect Harmonization realm as well.

“Fifth Brother, are you challenging the trial today as well?” the younger of the duo asked with a smile.

“Sixth Sister has managed to clear four trials after her previous breakthrough. As her elder brother, how can I lose out to her? If I can’t match her at the very least, Father might just start looking down on me!” the man addressed as Fifth Brother replied with a glint in his eyes.

The older of the duo was the Fifth Prince of Hongyuan Empire, Yu Hong, and the younger was the Eighth Prince, Yu Zheng.

“Even the most talented of us siblings, our Third Brother, only managed to clear the third trial when he was at Perfect Harmonization realm. Yet, Sixth Sister managed to clear the fourth trial. She sure is amazing! In fact, it is after hearing about her matter that I came over today to see if I can surpass my previous limit and reach higher grounds!” Yu Zheng nodded.

“The Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway works wonders in tempering one’s soul, but it also exerts immense pressure on it as well. Without a resilient mind, it could result in loss of consciousness or even a trauma in one’s soul. You have been dispatched to guard the borders until recently, so it must have been a long time since you have cultivated your soul. If you find yourself reaching your limit, don’t force yourself to continue. You can always try again another time,” Yu Hong advised.

“Don’t worry, Fifth Brother. I might have been guarding the border, but I haven’t slacked on my training either. Even if I

can't clear the third trial, I think I should still be able to get pretty far," Yu Zheng said confidently.

Yu Hong nodded. "That's good."

...

Soon, the duo arrived at the 'alley' that Zhang Xuan had gone through previously.

"Let's start then!"

Exchanging glances, the duo stepped into the passageway simultaneously with grim expressions. However, in just a few steps, they could already feel an overwhelming pressure crushing their soul, and their bodies began to sway unsteadily. Cold sweat began flowing down their backs.

"Hold on!"

The duo exchanged glances before clenching their teeth and pushing onward. As they ventured deeper into the passageway, their bodies began shaking more and more intensely.

Pu!

Yu Zheng was the first one to cave in. Spurting a mouthful of blood, his body abruptly fell to the ground. Sighing deeply, he said, "Fifth Brother, I can't go on any further. I guess I am still stuck on the second trial for the time being... Good luck!"

"Thanks!" Yu Hong squeezed out through his clenched teeth before trudging forward arduously.

Inscribed on the walls of the passageway were soul cultivation techniques, but if one wanted to read them, one would have to endure the increasing pressure on their soul from the passageway. Each trial was roughly five meters, and there was a total of nine trials in the passageway.

If a Perfect Harmonization realm could clear the third trial, he could already be considered a talented soul cultivator.

Pu!

A few more steps later, Yu Hong's face paled. His knees caved in, and he fell to the ground as well.

Even though he had been diligently cultivating his soul day and night, he was still unable to clear the third trial!

“I am still too weak...”

The two princes looked at one another and shook their heads in frustration.

Hearing that the Sixth Princess had managed to clear the fourth trial had motivated them to give the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway another try, but their results still didn't live up to their expectations. This passageway was simply far too difficult!

After resting for a moment and feeling the stabbing pain in their heads disappear, they stood up and left the premises.

“It seems like we are still too weak... I guess the current record holder is still Sixth Sister, right?” Yu Zheng asked.

“I would think so. Let's go and take a look...” Yu Hong nodded.

The duo walked up to a wall outside the passageway, and Yu Hong placed his palm on it lightly.

This wall was known as the Wall of Records, and it detailed the results of the current record holder of the passageway's challengers.

Weng!

With a slight buzz, a few words appeared on the Wall of Records—First Trial: Two Breaths!

“Two breaths? Sixth Sister cleared the first trial in two breaths? That is unbelievable!” Yu Zheng widened his eyes in astonishment.

“That is impossible! Even if she can reach the fourth trial, it shouldn't be possible for her to clear the first trial in two breaths... Let's take a look at her result for the second trial...” Yu Hong frowned in bewilderment as he swiped his hand on the wall.

Weng!

Yet another row of words appeared—Second Trial: Two Breaths!

“Two breaths again?”

The duo stared at one another in disbelief. They hurriedly swiped the wall once again.

Weng!

Third Trial: Two Breaths!

Fourth Trial: Two Breaths!

Fifth Trial: Two Breaths!

Sixth Trial: Two Breaths!

...

All the way up to the ninth trial, the recorded challenger had only used two breaths.

“Someone managed to clear the ninth trial... and in two breaths for all of them at that?”

The two princes exchanged glances, and they could see sheer horror reflected in the other’s eyes.

Was this for real?

They couldn’t even clear the third trial, and yet someone managed to clear all of the nine trials in two breaths each, no more and no less?

Was the person strolling instead of challenging the trials?

“The person who made the existing record didn’t leave their name behind,” Yu Zheng noted.

After a moment of contemplation, Yu Hong said, “Let’s call Uncle Bai here. He is in charge of this passageway, so he probably has some way of finding the person who left the record!”

“Alright!”

The duo left the passageway hurriedly, and not too long later, they returned with a middle-aged man following behind them.

If Zhang Xuan were there, he would surely be able to recognize the middle-aged man as the Saint 1-dan pinnacle expert he had encountered back in the residence filled with stone tablets.

“What happened for you two to call me over so anxiously?” Uncle Bai asked with his eyebrows knitted tightly together.

He was in the midst of pursuing that intruding soul, and he didn't have time to waste with these two princes.

“Uncle Bai, did you or my father challenge the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway in the last two days? How do you expect us to break the record you left there?” Yu Hong asked with a bitter smile.

“What are you saying? Why would we challenge the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway?” Uncle Bai replied with a deep frown.

He had been spending his time studying the ancient stone tablets in recent years, so how could he have the time to spare to challenge the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway.

This was even more so for Yu Shenqing, the emperor of Hongyuan Empire. With an endless stream of work on his hands, he couldn't possibly find the time to challenge the passageway either.

“But... if isn't my father or you, who else could have left that record?” Hearing Uncle Bai deny the matter, Yu Hong hurriedly placed his palm on the Wall of Records once more.

Weng!

The records reflected previously appeared again.

“T-t-two breaths?” Uncle Bai's body staggered weakly, and he nearly fainted from shock.

“Even with His Majesty's and my cultivation, we can only reach the eighth trial. Furthermore, beyond the sixth trial, every single step made will take us a very long time, and it could easily take up to an hour for us to clear the trial. To succeed in just two breaths... J-just who could it be?”

Uncle Bai was in disbelief as well.

The Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway was created by an old ancestor of the Yu Clan to challenge the later generations. The pressure emanated by the passageway had the astounding effect of tempering souls, and it was due to this that the Yu Clan was reputed for its soul cultivation amid the many Tier-1 Empires.

Countless outstanding geniuses had emerged in the Yu Clan over the years, but still, no one had succeeded in clearing the ninth trial to enter the hall... So how could there be a record reflected for the ninth trial?

Not to mention, two breaths?

If he recalled correctly, there wasn't such a record when Yu Fei-er challenged the passageway yesterday after coming out of her seclusion...

"Could it be..." Uncle Bai's eyes narrowed as he recalled the soul he had encountered earlier.

"No, I have to check the hall..." Realizing what could have happened, he quickly circumvented the passageway and headed to the hall lying behind it.

As the manager of the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway, he had the authority to enter the hall even without clearing the passageway itself.

Pushing open the door, he rushed into the hall, and what he saw left his eyelids twitching uncontrollably.

The dense concentration of spiritual energy that should have been inside the hall had disappeared without a trace, and the four ancestral sculptures that were used to temper the souls of later generations had lost their glow. With a touch, 'huala!', the sculptures crumbled to the ground.

"Damn it... Just who is that fellow?!" Uncle Bai felt as if he was going insane.

Harnessed in this hall was the overwhelming aura of their ancestors, and had he not been the manager of the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway, he would have never dared to enter the grounds. Who could the intruder have been to be able to enter the hall and reduce it to such a state?

To be able to achieve this feat, just how powerful must his soul be?

“No, I must report this matter to His Majesty immediately...”

Alarmed, Uncle Bai hurriedly rushed to the main hall, where Yu Shenqing was.

...

In a majestic assembly room of the royal palace, Yu Shenqing had just finished going through the reports and was currently closing his eyes for a short rest.

An old eunuch walked into the room and said, “Reporting to Your Majesty, the Master Teacher Academy has sent a notice saying that the inauguration ceremony for the succeeding principal will be held in three days, and they have invited Your Majesty to witness the ceremony!”

“Un, understood. Tell them that I will be there!” Yu Shenqing nodded.

Even though the Master Teacher Academy was located within Hongyuan Empire, in terms of standing and influence, he could be said to be beneath the academy’s principal.

Upon becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy, that person could be said to have become the number one figure of Hongyuan Empire. Even he, despite being the emperor of Hongyuan Empire, wouldn’t dare to treat the principal with the slightest disrespect.

The old eunuch nodded. “Yes, Your Majesty!”

“Right, did they mention who the succeeding principal will be?” Shen Yuqing asked.

“Your Majesty, they didn’t reveal who the succeeding principal will be, but they did mention that Mu shi from the headquarters will be overseeing the inauguration ceremony personally!” the eunuch replied.

“Mu shi? You are referring to 7-star master teacher Mu Yuan?” Yu Shenqing’s eyes lit up in agitation.

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

“If he is going to be overseeing the ceremony personally, the principal must be either Lu Feng or Zhao Bingxu. Send someone in to ask about the identity of the succeeding principal so that we can prepare an appropriate gift in advance!” Yu Shenqing waved his hands.

Lu Feng and Zhao Bingxu had different main supporting occupations, so their interests differed as well.

If it was Lu Feng, they would have to prepare some valuable medicinal herbs. If it was Zhao Bingxu, they would have to prepare some precious ores.

The fate of Hongyuan Empire was intricately linked with the Master Teacher Academy. If he could win the favor of the new principal, he might be able to consolidate the royal authority that the Yu Clan wielded.

The old eunuch frowned. “But Your Majesty, since they didn’t reveal the identity of the succeeding principal in the notice, I am afraid that we might not be able to receive an answer from them.”

If the other party didn’t reveal to them who the new principal was, it could only mean that they had a reason for doing so. Since that was the case, the result would be the same no matter how many times they asked for it.

Yu Shenqing waved his hands casually. “Tell them that it is a personal request from me, the school heads should at least give me some leeway. Besides, it’s no big deal to learn of the identity of the next principal in advance.”

As the emperor of Hongyuan Empire, even if his standing couldn’t be matched with the principal, he could at least be considered an equal to the Ten Great Master Teachers. If they were to ask under his name, the other party should speak.

“Yes, Your Majesty!” the old eunuch nodded.

“Right, has Fei-er’s birthday banquet begun yet?” Yu Shenqing suddenly asked.

“As Your Majesty is still here, we dare not start the banquet yet...”

“I see. Tell her I will be heading over now...” Yu Shenqing said as he stood up from his throne. “Right, is that Zhang Xuan fellow here yet?”

“Reporting to Your Majesty, Zhang shi is currently seated in the main hall!”

“Has he caused any trouble yet?” Yu Shenqing asked with a frown.

“He has been sitting quietly ever since his arrival. He must be lying low, knowing that he is currently in the royal palace...”

The old eunuch knew that Shen Yuqing was interested in Zhang Xuan, so he had been keeping an eye out for his affairs.

“Good!” Shen Yuqing nodded. “Let’s go over to take a look!”

Thus, he began making his way toward the main hall, where the banquet was held.

858 Zhang Xuan, Rejected!

I am finally out!

After cultivating his soul to the Ethereal Treading realm, Zhang Xuan had left the residence and continued moving straight, and soon, he managed to escape from the royal palace.

Upon leaving the palace, he scanned his surroundings and swiftly deduced where he was.

After which, he suppressed his aura to the bare minimum and swiftly made his way through to the main entrance of the royal palace and then the main hall where the banquet was held.

As soon as he entered the main hall, he immediately darted back to his body before heaving a huge sigh of relief.

In his short journey, even though he failed to find the Bodhi Saint Tree, he did manage to compile the Ethereal Treading realm Heaven's Path Soul Art, so it wasn't a complete waste of time.

Also, he managed to get an insight into the layout and security of the royal palace, especially regarding the existence of soul cultivators in the palace. With this knowledge, he would be able to better plan his movements the next time.

Seeing Zhang Xuan open his eyes, Luo Qiqi, who sat beside him, asked with a glint in her eyes, "Teacher, are you done cultivating?"

"Un." Zhang Xuan nodded. "Has the banquet begun yet?"

"Not yet, but it should be starting soon. All of the guests have arrived," replied Luo Qiqi.

Coincidentally, at that moment, a eunuch outside suddenly announced, "Her Highness has arrived!"

Everyone swiftly turned their gazes to the doorway, and they saw a beautiful figure slowly making her way in; it was Yu Fei-er.

She was dressed in a purple dress embedded with innumerable gemstones, and it glowed beautifully beneath the light of the Night Illumination Pearls.

She had light make-up on, which further accentuated her beautiful facial features, sending the hearts of men leaping uncontrollably.

She was simply too beautiful!

“Your Highness!” A fiery passion lit up in Shen Jun’s eyes upon seeing Yu Fei-er, and he hurriedly rushed forward to greet her.

However, Yu Fei-er paid him no heed, walking straight past him. Her beady eyes scanned the hall swiftly, and before long, she found Zhang shi’s figure.

“Zhang shi, Qiqi, you are all here!”

With a delighted expression, she rushed up to the group excitedly.

Even though she had sent an invitation letter to Zhang shi, she wasn’t sure whether he would really come. After all, considering the latter’s personality, he would probably have no qualms snubbing even the royal family.

Thus, upon seeing him, she heaved a sigh of relief.

“Fei-er, you are really beautiful today!” Luo Qiqi complimented earnestly.

In terms of beauty, the both of them could be considered equal, each possessing their own unique charms. However, Yu Fei-er had dressed up meticulously today, allowing her to grab the spotlight as soon as she stepped into the room.

“Brother Shen, isn’t that the greedy fellow you spoke of?” Liu gongzi asked Shen Jun doubtfully.

Didn’t you talk to him earlier?

Why does it seem like Princess Yu Fei-er is more concerned with him than you?

“Humph!” Shen Jun’s expression turned livid.

Even without Liu Gongzi pointing it out, he could see it clearly.

Privately, he had already viewed Yu Fei-er as his woman, and he had been destroying all rivals who dared stand in his path. Even Xing Yuan had been utterly defeated by him, so where did this fellow pop up from?

He had thought that that fellow was just an insignificant figure, but from the looks of it now, that wasn't the case!

“Sixth Princess, it has been too long since we last met. Knowing that it's your birthday, I specially prepared this for you...”

Concealing his displeasure in the depths of his heart, he put on a warm smile before walking up to Yu Fei-er once more and presented a jade box to her.

Weng!

A dense concentration of spiritual energy gushed out from within, leaving those standing before it feeling energized and spirited.

“This is... the inner core of a Saint 1-dan Water Serpent?” someone amid the crowd exclaimed in shock.

“The inner core of a saint beast?”

“What an incredible gift!”

Hearing that voice, a commotion broke out in the main hall. Everyone was shocked.

Relishing the shocked expressions of the crowd, Shen Jun chuckled lightly and explained gleefully, “Indeed, this is the inner core of a Saint 1-dan Water Serpent. I heard that it has the ability to nourish a cultivator's body, and if one wears it frequently, it can help to calm their state of mind and enhance their cultivation speed. As such, I specially made the trip to the depths of the ocean to obtain one for Your Highness!”

The Water Serpent wasn't a member of the Dragon Tribe; it was only a unique saint beast living in the deep oceans. Nevertheless, its inner core was a highly sought after artifact due to the incredible properties it possessed.

If a cultivator wore it on them often, it could increase their rate of cultivation and strengthen their body.

As such, its inner core was easily worth hundreds of high-tier spirit stones.

As expected of Shen Jun, his hand was indeed amazing. In an instant, the gifts that the others had prepared for the princess seemed to pale in comparison.

“Thank you...”

Yu Fei-er also hadn't expected Shen Jun to present her with such a valuable gift. Nevertheless, she gracefully took the gift and stowed it in her storage ring.

As the princess of Hongyuan Empire, she had seen plenty of treasures in her time. The inner core of a Water Serpent might be valuable, but it wasn't enough to make her lose her nerve.

“It is my pleasure!” Seeing Yu Fei-er accept his present, Shen Jun's lips curled up in delight. He turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan and asked, “Today is Her Highness's birthday. May I know what gift Brother Zhang has prepared for her?”

In an instant, all gazes fell upon Zhang Xuan.

They had also noticed that the princess had walked straight up to this Zhang shi after entering the hall. No matter how slow they were, it was clear that Shen Jun was challenging his ‘love rival’.

“Me? I didn't prepare one.” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

He had only learned that it was Yu Fei-er's birthday right before stepping into the main hall, so how could he have the time to prepare a gift in advance?

He had always been poor, so he couldn't afford a treasure like the other party's Saint realm Water Serpent's inner core.

Besides, even if he had such a treasure in his possession, he also couldn't bring himself to give it to Yu Fei-er anyway.

After all, his relationship with her wasn't as close as with Luo Qiqi.

Since it was a fact that he had no gift, he might as well admit it candidly.

“You didn’t prepare one? Cough cough!” Shen Jun had prepared lines in advance to put Zhang Xuan down as soon as he took out his gift, but upon hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, he nearly choked on his own words.

He had thought that by putting down Zhang Xuan’s gift, he could quash the latter’s pride while highlighting his own sincerity, but who could have known that the other party hadn’t even brought one?

The crowd was dumbfounded by the revelation as well.

To think that there would be a person who didn’t prepare anything while attending the princess’s birthday banquet... Are you sure that you aren’t teasing us?

Recovering from his surprise, Shen Jun sneered coldly, “Brother Zhang, your joke isn’t funny at all! It is out of sincerity that Her Highness has invited us to her birthday banquet, so it is natural that we should reciprocate with a gift... and yet, you arrived empty-handed. Don’t you think that this is greatly disrespectful to Her Highness?”

Yu Fei-er’s face darkened upon hearing Shen Jun’s words. “Shen Jun, what do you mean by those words? Zhang shi is my guest!”

Seeing that the princess was speaking up for Zhang Xuan, Shen Jun felt his blood boiling in rage. “Your Highness, it is your birthday today, and we have all prepared gifts for you. Yet, Zhang shi chose to come empty-handed. It is clear that he is disrespecting you!”

“He...” Yu Fei-er was just about to say that she hadn’t told Zhang Xuan that it was her birthday banquet when she saw Zhang Xuan waving his hands casually.

“Does a gift truly signify respect for a person? Does the value of a gift really signify how much respect one has for another? So... are you implying that the reason Her Highness invited everyone to this banquet is to demand gifts from everyone?” Zhang Xuan asked with a sharp glint in his eyes. “In your eyes, is Her Highness a petty person who pursues little gains?”

“This... That is not what I mean!”

Not expecting the other party to twist his words in such a manner, Shen Jun's complexion turned awful. "What I am saying is that the fact you chose to arrive empty-handed signifies your lack of respect for Her Highness..."

"So, in other words, you are saying that my lack of a gift signifies a lack of respect, and your valuable gift signifies a great deal of respect. In the end, aren't you still implying that Her Highness is only interested in the gifts and not the people giving them?"

Zhang Xuan shook his head grimly and said, "To insult Her Highness like that, just what malicious intentions do you have?"

"Stop spouting nonsense! When did I insult Her Highness?"

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was pinning such a huge sin on him, Shen Jun turned to Yu Fei-er anxiously and said, "Your Highness, don't listen to his words. This isn't what I meant..."

On the other hand, Luo Qiqi, who had been watching the farce from the side, nearly burst into laughter.

Her teacher's mouth sure was a formidable weapon.

It is one thing for you not to bring a gift to Fei-er's birthday banquet, but to think that you can still take pride in it, arguing unabashedly that the other party was insulting Fei-er by bringing a gift here...

The crowd was also dumbstruck by the turn of events.

They had all prepared gifts of their own as well, but given the current circumstances... if they were to present them, it would look as if they were implying that the princess was a superficial person who was only interested in material gains. Yet, if they didn't present them, it would seem as if they were being disrespectful... Conflicted, their faces scrunched up tightly as if they were suffering from constipation.

Interrupting Shen Jun's apology, Yu Fei-er flung her sleeves and harrumphed. "Alright, that is enough. I have invited everyone here today just to get together. If anyone dares to present me with another present, I will ask you to leave and

never return. I, Yu Fei-er, will not welcome you in the royal palace!”

“I...” Shen Jun’s face turned livid, and he clenched his fists tightly together.

After going through so much trouble to obtain such a valuable gift, he had thought that he would be able to win the princess’ fancy. Who would have thought that not only did his gift not delight her, it even incurred her ire instead!

What was this?

He had truly made a huge loss this time around.

It’s all that fellow’s fault! Glaring at Zhang Xuan coldly, Shen Jun flung his sleeves furiously and returned to his seat.

He was currently in a disadvantageous position. The more he talked, the deeper he would err. As such, he decided to back down silently for the moment. In any case, as long as the fellow remained in Hongyuan City, he would surely be able to find a chance to teach him a lesson in the future.

To think that a day would come when he, despite being the successor of the Shen Clan and reaching Chrysalis realm pinnacle at such a young age, would suffer such a setback in the hands of a twenty-year-old brat.

Just the thought of it left him incredibly stifled inside.

...

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan ignored the infuriated Shen Jun and turned his eyes to Yu Fei-er and asked, “Are you currently cultivating your soul?”

While he snuck around the royal palace in his soul form earlier, even though he had failed to find the Bodhi Saint Tree, he did notice that the royal family seemed to pay quite a bit of attention to the cultivation of the soul. Since Yu Fei-er was a member of royalty as well, she should have dabbled in soul cultivation.

“I did cultivate my soul for a while.” Yu Fei-er nodded as she gazed at Zhang Xuan doubtfully, unsure of what he was up to.

“I learned from Xing Yuan earlier that your royal family specializes in soul cultivation, so I spent some time a moment ago to tailor a soul cultivation technique for you. Consider it my birthday gift to you!” Zhang Xuan told her telepathically.

He had secretly learned the soul cultivation secret arts of the royal family and devoured an entire hall’s worth of spiritual energy dry... Given that he had taken so much from the other party, it was imperative that he returned the favor.

“A soul cultivation technique tailored for me?”

“Un, I came up with it while musing over the quintessence of demonic tunes and terpsichorean arts. It has a high affinity with your constitution!” Zhang Xuan replied.

His inheritance of the soul oracle’s heritage was a secret that he couldn’t reveal, and he couldn’t possibly tell the other party that he had secretly learned their soul cultivation secret arts either. Thus, he could only try to cover it by using his high mastery as a demonic tunist and terpsichore as a front.

In any case, he stood at the peak for those two occupations in the Master Teacher Academy, so there was no one who was sufficiently qualified to question him.

“This...”

After a moment of hesitation, Yu Fei-er clenched her teeth and said, “I... don’t want it!”

“You don’t want it?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

Since the cultivation technique was from him, there was no doubt about its prowess. At the very least, it was several times stronger than the Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art!

Yet, the other party said she didn’t want it!

To think that an impartation from the principal of the Master Teacher Academy... would actually be turned down!

This... what was going on?

859 Yu Shenqing's Suspicious

“I am delighted that Zhang shi has specially tailored a cultivation technique for me, but... I can't accept it!” Yu Fei-er shook her head.

Zhang Xuan asked with a frown, “You do understand how valuable a cultivation technique from me is, right? As long as you cultivate it, your soul cultivation will potentially increase manyfold!”

Those were not empty words. Even if it was a simplified of Heaven's Path Soul Art, the essence of demonic tunes, terpsichorean arts, and the Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art were infused into it. If Yu Fei-er were to study it, her soul cultivation would surely rise by leaps and bounds.

It would just be a matter of time before she surpassed the emperor or even the middle-aged man from before.

“It is precisely because I know that it is valuable that I can't accept it,” Yu Fei-er said hesitantly. “Why don't I buy it from you instead?”

If she were to accept Zhang Xuan's cultivation technique without giving anything in return, it would be equivalent to acknowledging Zhang Xuan as her half-teacher. In the Master Teacher Academy, traditions were extremely important, and the order between a teacher and a student had to be respected. If she were to become Zhang Xuan's student, everything else that she hoped for would become a pipe dream.

However, it would be a different matter if she were to purchase it from Zhang Xuan.

Upon Yu Fei-er's insistence, Zhang Xuan eventually nodded. “... Alright then!”

He lifted his forefinger and tapped the other party's forehead.

Weng!

Yu Fei-er's body jolted, and a complete set of cultivation techniques emerged in her consciousness.

"This..." With just a single glance, her eyes bulged from their sockets, and she couldn't stop her body from trembling in agitation.

The set of cultivation techniques she had just received was simply too profound. It was far stronger than the one she was currently cultivating!

"This is simply too valuable; I don't think I can afford it. I will report it to my father and have him compensate you duly..." Yu Fei-er hurriedly said with her face flushed.

She had thought that no matter how powerful the set of cultivation techniques Zhang Xuan came up with was, it couldn't possibly be more formidable than the secret arts passed down in their lineage. However, from her very first glance, she realized that before Zhang Xuan's set of cultivation techniques, her clan's secret arts were nothing at all. Even if she were to hand the secret arts to him, he might not even be willing to spare them a single glance.

This was how big the difference was.

"I'm fine with anything." Zhang Xuan waved his hands, indicating that he wasn't bothered.

Raising his soul cultivation could boost his chances at saving Wei Ruyan, so he had made the decision to absorb the spiritual energy within the mysterious hall in the royal palace. Nevertheless, he felt guilty about the matter, so he had decided to repay the favor by imparting a set of soul cultivation techniques to them.

As for how the other party decided to deal with this matter, that was no longer under his control.

While they were discussing this matter with one another, Shen Jun's face was progressively turning darker and darker, and it looked as if he would explode at any moment. At this very moment, he felt as if a grassy field had sprouted above his head.[1]

As the duo were communicating telepathically, he had no way of telling what they were saying. However, there was a moment when Zhang Xuan had struck Yu Fei-er's forehead lightly, and the latter's face had turned red in embarrassment...

How could they flirt so openly before him, treating him as if he were invisible?

"Damn it, damn it! Liu Quan, look into the background of that fellow when we return later!" Shen Jun spat through gritted teeth as he crushed the wine cup in his hand with immense force.

He had only returned to the capital not too long ago, so he wasn't aware of the recent happenings. On top of that, Zhang Xuan's full name hadn't been revealed in the introduction, so it was inevitable that he wasn't able to recognize him.

"Alright!" Liu Quan nodded. "Since he is a student of the Master Teacher Academy as well... When I left earlier, my father told me a new principal will be inaugurated at the Master Teacher Academy in three days, and he said that he would take me to watch. We can make use of that opportunity to bring in a few men to pummel that fellow so as to teach him a lesson!"

"That's a good plan. It is decided then; I will bring a few of my men there as well. I swear that I will pummel him until he is forced to crawl on the floor to search for his fallen teeth..." Shen Jun sneered viciously.

...

Right after leaving the residence, Uncle Bai headed right for the assembly room where Yu Shenqing should have been.

However, when he arrived at the assembly room, a eunuch walked up to him and said, "Reporting to the Seventh King, today is the Sixth Princess's birthday, so His Majesty has gone to the main hall to attend her banquet."

"Alright, I will head there now."

Not daring to waste a single moment, Uncle Bai rushed all the way to the main hall, and finally, at the main hall's entrance, he caught up with the emperor and his entourage.

“Brother...” Uncle Bai hurriedly called out.

“Mubai, for you to be in such a rush, what’s wrong?” Yu Shenqing frowned.

Uncle Bai’s full name was Yu Mubai, and he was the Seventh King of Hongyuan Empire, as well as Yu Shenqing’s blood-related younger brother.

“The matter is like this. I went to the stone tablets earlier in order to decipher them...” Knowing that this matter was of grave importance, Yu Mubai hurriedly explained everything that he had encountered in detail.

“You are saying that a soul-like object has appeared in the royal palace, and the Soul Tempering Hall has been destroyed? On top of that, someone managed to clear the ninth trial of the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway, using only two breaths for each of the trials?” Yu Shenqing’s body staggered as he shook his head in disbelief.

As the emperor of a Tier-1 Empire, he had heard of many huge matters throughout his life. Yet, when he heard the other party’s account, he felt as if his head was unable to keep up.

As the head of the Yu Clan, he knew full well how difficult the Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway was.

Even with his prowess, in the face of that crushing pressure, he was still unable to clear the eighth trial

Yet, someone had managed to clear even the ninth trial in just two breaths... and that wasn’t all. That person had even rushed into the Soul Tempering Hall and absorbed all of the spiritual energy contained in the area, causing the ancestral sculptures to shatter...

How powerful must that person’s soul be?

“That’s right!” Yu Mubai nodded as he looked at Yu Shenqing worriedly. “Your Majesty, shall we activate the Great Palace Defensive Formation to capture that fellow?”

The Great Palace Defensive Formation was capable of stopping even Saint 3-dan experts. Even if the enemy they

were facing was intangible, they were certain that they could trap him with it.

Yu Shenqing shook his head. “That won’t do. The moment that we activate the formation, pandemonium could very possibly break out in the royal palace. Furthermore, considering that his presence has been exposed, chances are that he has already gotten away.”

Unless the empire was on the brink of destruction, the Great Palace Defensive Formation shouldn’t be activated. Otherwise, putting aside the pandemonium in the palace, it could cause huge unrest among the populace as well, knowing that the country was threatened. If so, not even he, as the emperor, could shoulder the responsibility.

Besides, until this point, they were still unsure of what they were dealing with. Even if they were to activate the formation and trap that fellow, considering the size of the royal palace, it wouldn’t be easy to find him either, considering the limited clues they had.

“What should we do then?”

After a moment of contemplation, Yu Shenqing said, “Increase the number of patrols in the royal palace, and if they find any suspicious individuals, we will send in experts immediately to apprehend that person!”

“Alright!” Yu Mubai nodded.

“For the time being, don’t tell anyone of this matter. The moment you receive any news, report to me immediately. That will be all. I have to attend Fei-er’s birthday banquet now.” Yu Shenqing waved his hands.

He was enraged that someone had barged into the Soul Tempering Hall and destroyed their ancestral sculptures as well, but as the emperor of a nation, he couldn’t allow his emotions to supersede his rationality.

After leaving behind those words, he turned around and continued making his way to the main hall. At that moment, he noticed that the old eunuch beside him had his eyebrows tightly knitted together.

“If you have any thoughts in mind, feel free to speak!” Yu Shenqing said nonchalantly.

The old eunuch had been with him for many years now. He knew that on top of being a Saint realm expert, the old eunuch possessed keen intellect, which allowed him to see through many matters as well.

“Your Majesty, wherever Zhang shi has gone, pandemonium ensued. Even his manor wasn’t spared from his antics... He also happens to be in the royal palace tonight, so could it be possible that... he has something to do with that matter?” the old eunuch asked.

There was simply something bizarre about Zhang Xuan.

Wherever he went, destruction and misfortune seemed to follow right behind... Knowing that he would attend the banquet tonight, they had invited several formation masters in to prevent any accidents from occurring...

But who could say for sure that it was foolproof?

Take this matter for example, while the main hall had been spared, the Soul Tempering Hall had been destroyed instead... Could Zhang Xuan have had something to do with this?

“Him?” Yu Shenqing frowned.

The old eunuch’s words were groundless and seemingly ridiculous, but when supported by the various rumors regarding Zhang Xuan that they had heard earlier, this hypothesis wasn’t completely illogical.

The mess that fellow had caused over the past half a month could leave even his eyebrows twitching uncontrollably.

If there was a person who could accomplish what Yu Mubai had just described, that fellow was definitely a huge suspect!

“But didn’t he arrive an hour and a half ago, and he hasn’t left his seat since then, right?” Yu Shenqing asked.

“Yes, Your Majesty. However, he was sitting in a daze on his seat for more than an hour in that duration!” the eunuch replied.

“He was sitting in a daze on his seat?”

“That’s right, Your Majesty. If what the Seventh King said was true, and the intruder is truly a soul, could it be that Zhang Xuan drew out his soul in the hour that he was in a daze...” the eunuch said hesitantly.

“He drew out his soul? Are you suspecting him of being a soul oracle?” Yu Shenqing’s face immediately turned livid.

“Your Majesty, this is just a hypothesis on my part,” the old eunuch replied with a lowered head.

“The soul oracles should have been completely eradicated by the Master Teacher Pavilion for siding with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe long ago, so their heritage should have disappeared from the face of the world. As a master teacher, Zhang Xuan should know better than to dabble in an occupation like that,” Yu Shenqing said with a deep frown.

“Actually, Your Majesty, we can uncover the truth with a simple test,” the old eunuch said.

“Un.” Yu Shenqing nodded grimly.

Flinging his sleeves, he walked into the main hall with widened strides. Just a moment after he stepped through the doors, he saw his beautifully-dressed daughter standing before a certain young man, serving him wine with a bent back.

His face immediately turned black.

How could there be a fellow so arrogant as to allow his noble daughter to serve him wine?

“Your Majesty, that person is Zhang Xuan, Zhang shi!” the old eunuch quickly informed him.

“He is Zhang Xuan?” Yu Shenqing muttered as he glared at Zhang Xuan with a wintry gaze.

He was already prejudiced against Zhang Xuan after hearing about everything the latter had made his daughter do when he encountered such a sight. In an instant, rage filled his mind.

“Fei-er, what are you doing?”

Yu Shenqing rushed forward and stared at his daughter grimly. “As a princess, how can you stoop down to serving another wine?”

The fact that the other party took you in as his maid is a form of insult to you and the royal family. How can you take it for real?

Zhang Xuan is just a mere 4-star master teacher! He might possess some extraordinary means, but he is far from qualified to have you serve him wine!

“Father, you are here!” Upon seeing Yu Shenqing, Yu Fei-er hurriedly stood up and bowed in greeting.

“Shen Jun (Liu Quan, Xing Yuan...) pays respect to Your Majesty!”

The others in the room also quickly stood up and bowed.

Following the others, Zhang Xuan also stood up, and after taking a glance at the authoritative middle-aged man before him, he clasped his fist and bowed as well.

He might be the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy, which would put his standing above that of the other party, but due to his unique circumstances, it was inconvenient for him to reveal his identity ahead of the inauguration ceremony. Thus, it was still best for him to follow the formalities.

“You are Zhang Xuan?” Yu Shenqing asked with a sharp glint in his eyes.

“Indeed, it is me.” Zhang Xuan nodded in response.

Yu Shenqing assessed Zhang Xuan for a moment before turning around and heading to the main seat in the hall.

While he was dying to test out whether that fellow was a soul oracle or not, as the emperor of the nation, he couldn't possibly make a move directly.

Not only would he be stooping beneath his standing, if his assumption proved to be false, he would have no way of accounting for this matter to the Master Teacher Pavilion.

On top of that, he could incur the hostility of his daughter too.

“Firstly, I would like to thank everyone for attending my young daughter’s birthday banquet!” Upon sitting down, Yu Shenqing scanned the surroundings and chuckled lightly. His movements were casual, but it carried a regal disposition that only emperors commanded.

“Since today is a joyous occasion, how can we go without music? Luo Fu, summon Musician Bai in to play a tune for us!”

“Yes!” Understanding the hidden meaning behind Yu Shenqing’s words, the old eunuch nodded and backed out of the room.

“Musician Bai? Could it be the renowned 6-star demonic tunist guest in the royal palace? It would truly be a great honor to listen to her playing!”

Upon hearing that Musician Bai would be playing for them, everyone’s eyes lit up in excitement.

[1] There is a Chinese story in which a wife makes her traveling husband wear a green hat whenever he leaves for an extended period of time to signal to her lover that it was safe to come to her home. A phrase derived from the story, if someone is ‘wearing a green hat’, it means that the person is being cuckolded. In this case, the grassy field is an exaggeration of the green hat.

860 Clash of Demonic Tunists

“Musician Bai?” Sensing the excited atmosphere in the room, Zhang Xuan turned to Yu Fei-er with a questioning look.

“Musician Bai is a demonic tunist whom my father specially invited as a guest to our royal palace. It is said that her proficiency has already reached 6-star pinnacle, and her playing resonates deeply with one’s soul. Ordinarily, only esteemed envoys of the empire have the honor of hearing her play,” Yu Fei-er replied with an agitated look.

As a 6-star demonic tunist, Musician Bai’s standing in society was generally lower than her apothecary and blacksmith peers. However, the set of skills she possessed made her more desirable in royal palaces and the manors of nobility.

For one, having such a talented musician in one’s home could better reflect their high standing. On top of that, Musician Bai’s playing had the effect of nurturing one’s soul if one were to listen to it frequently.

“It seems like she is a performance-type demonic tunist,” Zhang Xuan noted.

Demonic tunists could be divided into two main categories—offensive and performance.

Take School Head Jiang Qingqin for example, as a master teacher, he shouldered the responsibility of protecting mankind and warding against the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe. Naturally, his field of specialty for his demonic tunes focused on the offensive aspect. His playing could rattle the souls of his enemies, rendering them powerless.

On the other hand, performance-type demonic tunists aimed to elevate their level of playing for non-offensive purposes. Their playing tended to possess some kind of benefit to those

listening to it, and even ordinary humans could enjoy their music.

Otherwise, if all demonic tunists were to leave behind a field of feathers each time they played, just like Zhang Xuan, those envoys in Hongyuan Empire would probably rush back to their empires and incite a war between both countries after listening to the playing.

For those gathered in this main hall to be excited at the opportunity to listen to Musician Bai's playing, it went without saying that she was a performance-type demonic tunist, whose playing could sooth and pleasure one.

Seeing that his daughter was still acting so intimately around that Zhang shi, Yu Shenqing said in displeasure, "Fei-er, come over!"

"Yes, Father!" Nodding, Yu Fei-er stood up and took the seat beneath her father's.

A short moment later, the old eunuch, Luo Fu, returned with a beautiful, white-robed lady behind him.

Her appearance might pale in comparison to Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi, but her face was still one that few could tear their gazes away from.

"Demonic Tunist Bai Xuan pays respect to Your Majesty, Sixth Princess, and the fellow young talents here!"

Upon stepping into the main hall, Musician Bai immediately bowed deeply and greeted everyone present. Her voice was melodious, reminiscent of a zither, leaving a numbing sensation in one's heart.

"Not bad!" Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

To be able to evoke the melody of a zither through her voice and not harm anyone despite playing a demonic tune, she did have some skills.

"Musician Bai, there is no need to stand on ceremony. Today is my daughter's birthday, so I would like to request a song from you to celebrate this joyous occasion!" Yu Shenqing said with a smile.

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Musician Bai nodded.

Sitting by the side, she flicked her wrist, and a zither materialized before her.

Upon seeing her zither, an excited commotion broke out amid the crowd.

“This must be Musician Bai’s Feathered Eagle Zither!”

“Legend has it that Musician Bai’s tamed beast, Green-tailed Eagle, died in the midst of trying to save her. In gratitude to her tamed beast, she forged a zither out of its feathers and even composed a song in remembrance of it. It is said that the melody harnesses the heart wrenching sorrow she experienced upon its death, and it can evoke the same emotions in the listeners as well!”

“I have heard of this before, too! It’s said that on the day she finished composing the song, countless divine cranes wept in sadness. It was after that incident that Musician Bai’s reputation spread far and wide. Countless experts in the capital considered it an honor to have heard her playing then!”

“I didn’t think that His Majesty would invite her over for Princess Yu Fei-er’s birthday. I will be able to brag about this matter for the next three days when I return!”

“Three days? This is sufficient for me to brag for the next three months!”

...

Everyone could hardly keep their exhilaration in check.

Offensive-type demonic tunists usually only displayed their prowess in battle, so they tended to be less famous. On the other hand, performance-type demonic tunists could easily win the hearts of others through their euphonious music, thus granting them widespread fame.

Hearing the discussion of the crowd, Musician Bai chuckled lightly before placing her slender fingers on the zither and plucking on a string slightly.

Trrringg!

It was an extremely deep sound that seemed as if it had come from the ancient past, and it reverberated right within their souls.

Zhang Xuan's eyes immediately lit up.

As a skilled demonic tunist himself, he could easily tell whether the other party was truly skilled or not. While Musician Bai's level of playing might be slightly beneath that of School Head Jiang's, she had embarked on a completely different path than him. Zhang Xuan couldn't help but anticipate what was going to come.

Triinnnggg tangg!

Under the light touch of Musician Bai, melodious music drifted from the zither. In the blink of an eye, the crowd found themselves standing before a vast plain. Countless birds were chirping harmoniously in the surroundings, and the aroma of flowers wafted in the air. It was a pleasurable sensation.

Unknowingly, everyone began to close their eyes to feel the music with their hearts.

Even Shen Jun had his eyes shut, immersed in the world carved out by the music.

An occupation that had been passed down through the ages, even if it was a Lower Nine Paths occupation, should never be underestimated.

Even a seemingly powerless painter, upon reaching the zenith, could bring out a fearsome army of millions at the tip of their brush, leaving powerful cultivators in despair.

...

Seeing that she had captured everyone within her music, Musician Bai chuckled softly before turning her sights to Zhang Xuan.

Before entering, she had already received the emperor's edict to test this young man.

Tring tang, trriiing tannngg!

There was an abrupt twist in the tune.

It was still a euphonic melody to the ears of others, but beneath this exterior, a powerful surge of soul energy was creeping swiftly toward a certain target.

Zhang Xuan was listening to the music carefully, trying to identify the main differences between a performance-type music and an offensive-type music, when his soul abruptly jolted.

An offensive edge had suddenly emerged amid the music to assault his soul.

How brazen!

Zhang Xuan swiftly dispelled the attack with his soul energy before directing a sharp gaze to Musician Bai to assess her.

As a 7-star demonic tunist, he could tell that the previous assault was an intentional act from her.

But... this was the first time the two of them had met, so there shouldn't be any grudges between them. Why would the other party attack him?

Could it be that... she knew that he was the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy and she was trying to assassinate him?

I can't discount this possibility. Too many people have told me that Hongyuan Empire isn't as peaceful as it seems, and even the elders of the Master Teacher Academy have chosen to conceal my identity until the inauguration ceremony in order to protect me as well... Perhaps, danger is closer to me than I thought! Zhang Xuan thought grimly.

Luo Ruoxin had told him one of the pathways between the Master Teacher Continent and the other worlds lay in Hongyuan City, and the Otherworldly Demons could exploit it to invade this land. The main purpose for the existence of the Master Teacher Academy was to keep a lookout on the passageway.

Besides that, the powerful Wu Yangzi being captured by Otherworldly Demons and Hu Yaoyao concealing her own lineage... All of these events simply pointed to treacherous currents lying beneath the surface of Hongyuan City. It

seemed there were many unspeakable secrets hidden in the depths of this place.

Musician Bai might be a respected figure in Hongyuan City, but to assault him abruptly in the midst of her performance, there was no doubt that she was up to no good!

Humph! You might stand a chance if you fight me directly, but to attempt to deal with me through demonic tunes... you have just sealed your own doom! Zhang Xuan's eyes turned cold.

He was only an Ethereal Treading realm primary stage cultivator at the moment, so if the other party had fought him in a normal battle, unless he were to bring out the Byzantium Helios Beast to fight in his stead, he would be utterly crushed. But... of all things, the other party had chosen to launch her attack through demonic tunes. She was courting her own death!

Even the powerful School Head Jiang has acknowledged me as his teacher! Yet, a performance-type demonic tunist like you dared to provoke me... You must really be tired of living!

Zhang Xuan slowly closed his eyes, acting as if he was immersed in the music like everyone else. However, his hands were moving elegantly to raise a wine gourd and wine cup before pouring the wine from the gourd into the cup slowly.

Swooshhhhh!

It was a sound reminiscent of a stream flowing down the towering mountains or a river flowing through a peaceful valley. It wasn't too loud, but mixed amid the zither melody, it caused the other party's assault to dull.

"Hmm?"

Sensing that the sound was perfectly timed to interfere during the pauses of her melody, Musician Bai swiftly realized that she was facing a skilled demonic tunist. Her eyebrows shot up, and she abruptly changed her playing style.

Tring tang tring trang ting tring!

Her playing hastened.

In an instant, the listeners felt as if a huge cavalry troop was charging across the vast plain. Dust rose in the horizon of the trembling earth as dark ominous clouds began to set in.

Come at me!

Having guessed that she would respond in such a manner, Zhang Xuan chuckled softly. Placing the gourd and cup on the table, he picked up a chopstick with his right hand and tapped it lightly on the cup, gourd, and plates intermittently.

Ting!

Even though they were all ceramic, so the music sounded a little monotonous, due to the food and wine in the dishes, cup, and gourd, Zhang Xuan was able to play different tones.

Ting ting tang, ting ting tang!

Limited by the tools at hand, the music Zhang Xuan played wasn't as rich as the other party's melody. However, each tap he made coincidentally landed on the brief pause in between each note of the zither melody, thus causing her tempo to go into chaos.

If one were to compare the zither playing of a demonic tunist to ripples in a body of water, Zhang Xuan's every tap would be timed perfectly at each trough of the wave. Not only did he manage to interfere in the other party's playing through this, even her bodily functions, such as her breathing and her heartbeat, began moving to his rhythm.

Shit, the other party is a true expert!

It was at this instant that Musician Bai realized what kind of opponent she was facing, and her face paled in fear.

Despite the seemingly calm showdown, a clash of demonic tunes was actually incredibly dangerous. The slightest carelessness could cause one side to lose their cultivation or even die!

As the saying goes, 'it is the silent dog that bites'. The more elegant an occupation seemed to be, the more treacherous it usually was.

Taking master teachers for example, they sought to become role models and bring enlightenment to the world, a truly noble occupation. However, if one were to incur their wrath, they could become an unstoppable force that even the heavens would pale in fear before.

The same went for demonic tunists.

The fact that the other party could generate such power with just dining tools showed that the other party's comprehension of demonic tunes far exceeded hers, reaching a height she couldn't have imagined.

If it had been on any other occasion, she would surely have clasped her fist and admitted defeat before fleeing as far away as she could. However, it seemed she had gone too far in provoking the other party, such that the other party was no longer willing to let her off. The intermittent taps had already harmonized perfectly with her zither music, and she could no longer stop the fight of her own accord anymore.

The moment her playing stopped, the momentum that had built up in the clash of their demonic tunes would come crashing down on her like a tsunami, and she could very well suffer a permanent impairment that would prevent her from playing another demonic tune in her life. In the worst-case scenario, her heart might even leap out of her throat, resulting in her immediate death.

Damn it!

Panicked, Musician Bai stood up and hastened her playing in an attempt to shake off the other party's intermittent taps. Due to her driving her zhenqi too fast, white smoke was puffing out of her head.

You want to go all out? Sure, I will grant your request!

Seeing the other party's playing getting even more intense, Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed. He grabbed another chopstick with his left hand and began tapping it on the table.

Dong dong dong!

The table had been crafted out of a unique lumber that produced a deep and powerful note reminiscent of a drum.

Even though he had only added a chopstick to his offense, the prowess he could exert was increased by more than twofold.

Pu!

From the very start, Musician Bai was already struggling under Zhang Xuan's counterattack. Now that Zhang Xuan had abruptly raised the intensity of his offense, how could she possibly withstand it? Her face paled, and a mouthful of blood spurted from her mouth. Her body flew back and struck a stone pillar in the hall.

Attempting to retreat? Try it if you can!

With a forceful strike on the plate, Zhang Xuan produced a reverberating sound reminiscent of the chiming of a bell.

Pu!

As if someone had struck her squarely on her chest, Musician Bai felt the zhenqi in her body running amok, and she spurted another mouthful of blood. Under the immense impact, the pillar behind her reached the limits of its durability and collapsed, and dust fell from the ceiling.

861 He Is the Principal?

The pillar might have collapsed, but as the hall had been fortified by numerous formations, it was still holding steady for the time being.

“What happened?”

“How was Musician Bai injured?”

“What happened?”

In the very brief period of time since their clash started, Musician Bai had been severely injured, crashing into a pillar and causing the entire hall to shake. Due to the huge disturbance, the crowd awakened from their trance and stared at one another with dazed expressions, confused by the situation before them.

There didn't seem to be anything wrong with Musician Bai's playing, so why would she abruptly spurt blood and break a pillar?

She had always been famed for her good-tempered and gentle nature; did a screw fall from her head today?

What happened? Taken aback, Yu Shenqing swiftly turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan.

As the one behind the matter, he knew that Musician Bai's bizarre actions definitely had something to do with the young man's use of chopsticks to tap on cups and plates.

Are they fighting with one another? Yu Shenqing frowned doubtfully.

Didn't I instruct Musician Bai to check if Zhang Xuan possesses any exceptional means to do with souls?

Why did they suddenly start fighting with one another instead?

Wait a minute... Could it be that Zhang Xuan is a demonic tunist as well?

As the only ones who knew that Zhang Xuan had taken the demonic tunist examinations were the student worker at the Demonic Tunist Aula, School Head Jiang, and Vice School Head Ning, this piece of news was missing from the intelligence Yu Shenqing had received from his men.

However, with Zhang Xuan knocking on the table and the plates, the truth couldn't be any more apparent to him.

Yu Fei-er turned to Yu Shenqing and said anxiously, "Father, Zhang Xuan is my guest. If anything happens to him, it will reflect badly on the royal family..."

Even though she had no idea why Musician Bai would make a move against Zhang Xuan, she knew that her father was definitely involved in this matter.

"Un." Knowing that his daughter's words rang true, Yu Shenqing nodded grimly. Turning to Musician Bai, he said, "Musician Bai Xuan, please stop!"

Yu Shenqing was unaware of the dangers involved in the clash of demonic tunes, so he thought that Bai Xuan was still carrying out his orders, oblivious to the fact that she was in a desperate situation herself.

"I..." Hearing Yu Shenqing's words, Bai Xuan was just about to explain the situation to him when the sound of Zhang Xuan's tapping sounds assaulted her once again.

Under the furious onslaught, she had to put her everything into playing her zither just to fend off Zhang Xuan's offense, leaving her with no additional energy to speak.

Deng deng deng deng!

The immense pressure she was placed under left her retreating uncontrollably, and every step that she took left a half chi deep footprint in the ground.

Peng!

Eventually, she found herself backed against the wall of the main hall. The Fortification Formation behind her glowed, obstructing her path, and her footsteps came to a halt.

"Hmm?"

Feeling the support behind her, Bai Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. In that instant, an idea suddenly came to mind.

With her back pressed against the wall, a smile emerged on her face as her crimson lips parted.

“His blue robe flutters in the wind; my heart wanders into the distance. Even if fate permits me not to be with you, is silence the only word you offer me?”

It was a song filled with remembrance. Even though it was filled with nostalgia, leaving one in a pensive trance, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up, and he abruptly got to his feet.

The other party was already on the verge of collapsing to his demonic tunes, but with the support of the Fortification Formation cast on the room, the other party had actually managed to neutralize his offense.

To put it simply, formations could be defined as the gathering of spiritual energy in specific positions in order to produce unique effects such as calling forth sword qi to attack one’s opponents or a mysterious fog to beguile others.

The essence of Fortification Formations lay not in making an infrastructure stronger but by neutralizing the attacks conducted on it, similar to a sponge.

Once the force was neutralized, naturally, the object fortified wouldn’t suffer any damage.

By hiding within the Fortification Formation, Zhang Xuan’s offense would be weakened by it, which gave the other party room to counterattack!

As the saying goes, ‘the sorrow of fond remembrances breaks the soul.’

If Zhang Xuan couldn’t counter the other party’s singing, he could lose his life!

In just a short moment, by utilizing the Fortification Formation, the other party had managed to turn the tables on him, and he fell into an extremely disadvantageous position.

Indeed, there is no occupation that should be underestimated!

But even though Zhang Xuan was in a disadvantageous position, there wasn't the slightest trace of anxiety or nervousness to be seen from him. Instead, with a light chuckle, he smacked the table, and the cup filled with wine flew up.

“A fine song indeed! Allow me to propose a toast to Musician Bai!”

His voice was also infused with the power of a demonic tune, instantly neutralizing the other party's singing. The next instant, he flicked the wine cup with his finger.

The direction the wine cup was heading toward wasn't Musician Bai but the wall beside her.

Dang lang!

Upon coming into contact with the wall, the wine cup immediately burst apart, shattering into numerous pieces before falling down. However, what was astonishing was that instead of falling to the ground, the broken shards suddenly stopped in midair.

Weng!

In the next instant, as if someone had stopped them at their cores, the Fortification Formations in the main hall suddenly came to a halt.

When Zhang Xuan had first arrived in the room, he had already taken a look at the various formations using his Eye of Insight, so he knew where the weaknesses of the formations were.

The wine cup he had flicked over was infused with his zhenqi, and even though it might seem as if the broken shards had parted in random directions, it was actually all under his control. Through manipulating the shards precisely, he managed to stop all of the Fortification Formations simultaneously.

It followed the same principles as his Formation Destroying Kick.

The formation has been halted? This is bad... Noticing the changes in the room, Yu Shenqing was alarmed.

He had been waiting for Musician Bai to stop when the latter abruptly started singing. Before he could process what was going on, Zhang Shi had already stood up and thrown the wine cup, and the formations had come to a sudden stop right after.

As if a déjà vu had struck him, he immediately stood up to intervene in the matter. But again, before he could do anything, Musician Bai, with the loss of the support from the Fortification Formation, succumbed to Zhang Xuan's assault, and with a frenzied spurt of blood, she was sent flying backward once more.

Hong long!

This time, without the additional protection from the formation, how could the wall behind her endure such immense force? In the blink of an eye, it had already collapsed into a pile of rubble.

Jiyaya!

The main hall was only supported by four pillars. It had lost one just a moment ago, and with another wall face collapsing, the entire room's support became extremely unstable. With a loud rumbling, the ceiling came crashing down.

Damn it! Yu Shenqing felt as if he was losing his mind.

That fellow was really a God of Destruction, collapsing everything that he came into contact with...

He had gone to the extent of inviting formation masters to heavily fortify the main hall, but it eventually still met with such an outcome!

Are you here to attend Yu Fei-er's birthday banquet or to demolish our buildings?

But knowing that this wasn't the time for that, he exerted his powerful zhenqi to hold up the collapsing ceiling so as to protect those in the room.

As a Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle expert, even if he was unable to undo the damage done to the building, he could at least break the fall of the collapsing rubble.

No matter what, it was his daughter's birthday. The main hall might have collapsed, but he couldn't allow any of those young talents to be injured due to it. Otherwise, what would this say about the royal family?

"Pardon me!"

After knocking Musician Bai out, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief and clasped his fist elegantly.

If the other party had fought with him as a cultivator, he might have suffered a tragic loss. But to challenge him to a battle of demonic tunes... that was pure foolishness!

After that, Zhang Xuan turned to Yu Shenqing and said with a righteous aura, "Your Majesty, I am a master teacher recognized by the Master Teacher Pavilion, and yet, Musician Bai over here secretly attacked me during her playing. It is clear that she is up to no good. I suspect that she is involved with the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe! I ask of Your Majesty to apprehend and interrogate her for the safety of the citizens of Hongyuan City!"

Otherworldly Demonic Tribe? Hearing those words, Yu Shenqing nearly keeled over.

I am the one who asked her to test you, how did the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe get into the picture?

Furthermore, I haven't settled the grudge with you for messing up my daughter's birthday banquet, how can you be so shameless as to dare speak up in such a righteous tone?

"If Your Majesty doubts my word, I beseech you to allow me to invite Pavilion Master Mo over to look into the matter!" Seeing Yu Shenqing's silence, Zhang Xuan thought that the other party might be doubting his words due to his long years of friendship with Musician Bai, so he made another suggestion.

On the other hand, hearing that Zhang Xuan was going to involve even the Master Teacher Pavilion in this matter, Yu Shenqing nearly erupted in rage.

Musician Bai was only testing you to see if you are a soul oracle by my order. Not only did you knock her out, you even

destroyed my building, so how can you still speak so boldly?

Flinging his sleeves furiously, Yu Shenqing harrumphed coldly. “Today is my daughter’s birthday banquet, but you messed up this joyous occasion with your antics. Regardless of whether Musician Bai attacked you or not, the royal palace welcomes you no more. Leave!”

Even though Yu Shenqing was so angry that he could kill, in the face of the crowd before him, he still had to uphold his bearings as an emperor. Furthermore, the other party was a master teacher, so he dared not go overboard.

“You are asking me to leave?” Not expecting the other party to not interrogate the culprit who had attacked him and instead order him to leave, Zhang Xuan frowned in displeasure.

“That’s right! From today on, I prohibit you, Zhang Xuan, from stepping onto the grounds of the Hongyuan royal palace. You are no guest of our royal family!” Yu Shenqing bellowed authoritatively.

If he could, he would have issued an even harsher punishment. However, Zhang Xuan had a close relationship with several school heads of the Master Teacher Academy, so he dared not go too far.

“Father...” Not expecting such a situation to evolve out of her birthday banquet, Yu Fei-er hurriedly turned to her father to plead with him.

“Speak no more. I have made up my mind!” Yu Shenqing waved his hands decisively.

“What are you waiting for? Did you not hear His Majesty’s words?”

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had incurred the emperor’s anger, Shen Jun almost burst into laughter. He swiftly stood up and bellowed at Zhang Xuan, making use of this opportunity to vent his anger.

“... Fine!” To think that he would be asked to leave like that, Zhang Xuan had no other words to say.

He would have already left had it not been Yu Fei-er's birthday banquet. Shaking his head, he turned around and walked out.

"Teacher, wait for me!" After shooting a glance at Yu Fei-er, Luo Qiqi quickly followed behind Zhang Xuan.

"Zhang shi..." Not expecting an unpleasant event like this to happen at her birthday banquet, Yu Fei-er's complexion turned awful. Clenching her jaw, she rushed forward to Zhang Xuan's side as well.

"Fei-er!" Seeing his daughter leave with Zhang Xuan, Yu Shenqing's expression turned so livid that it seemed as if one could squeeze ink from it.

Rage clouded his mind, and just as he was about to command his subordinates to capture Yu Fei-er and bring her back, the old eunuch standing by the side of the room, Luo Fu, suddenly flicked his wrist and took out a jade token. Taking a look at it, his face suddenly warped in astonishment.

Luo Fu immediately rushed up to Shen Yuqing and called for him with lips quivering in fright. "Your Majesty..."

"What's wrong?" Yu Shenqing asked impatiently.

"We have just received news regarding the identity of the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy..." Luo Fu told Yu Shenqing telepathically, not daring to speak aloud.

"Who is it? Lu Feng? Or is it Zhao Bingxu?" Yu Shenqing asked anxiously in response.

Yu Fei-er's matter might be important, but getting on good terms with the succeeding principal was even more so. After all, the latter concerned the future of the Yu Clan, whether it would rise to greater heights or fall into decline.

"Your Majesty, it is neither of them! The succeeding principal is Zh... Zhang Xuan!" Luo Fu's voice was shaking in fear.

"Zhang Xuan? The man who has just walked out... Zhang Xuan?" Yu Shenqing suddenly felt as if the sky had collapsed on him.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Luo Fu hurriedly nodded.

Without any hesitation, Yu Shenqing got his feet and rushed out of the room. “Zhang shi, don’t leave! I think there is some kind of misunderstanding between us...”

“...” Shen Jun.

“...” The crowd.~16cm

862 Yu Shenqing's Regre

Hong long long!

Shortly after Yu Shenqing left, the zhenqi propping the ceiling up disappeared, and the room collapsed entirely. Debris flew randomly in the area, and a cloud of dust rose in the air.

The young talents swiftly rushed out of the room. Glancing at the rubble and the emperor who was busy running as he shouted "Misunderstanding!", they found themselves completely stupefied.

"What has happened... to His Majesty?" Liu Quan muttered in a daze.

It was just moments ago that he had domineeringly commanded for the other party to leave the royal palace and never return, but in the blink of an eye, he was suddenly chasing the other party, claiming that it was all just a misunderstanding...

Could anyone have a change of mind faster than him?

"How would I know?" Shen Jun was bewildered by the bizarre turn of events as well.

When he'd seen Yu Shenqing lashing out at Zhang Xuan, he had stood up to berate the other party as well. However, with Yu Shenqing abruptly changing his mind, his actions suddenly became a joke. Placed in an awkward position, he had no idea whether he should stay or just leave.

"So... are we still going to teach that fellow a lesson?" Liu Quan asked hesitantly.

Even the emperor had chased the other party, screaming that it was a misunderstanding... Was it really fine for them to teach the other party a lesson?

"Of course! However, just in case, we shall find a few outsiders to do the job for us. As long as they can't trace the

matter back to us, it will do!” Shen Jun said with a glint in his eyes.

If Yu Shenqing had maintained his hostility toward Zhang Xuan, he wouldn't have viewed the latter as a threat to him.

Ultimately, as a princess of Hongyuan Empire, Yu Fei-er's marriage was still dictated by her father. As long as her father opposed it, there was no way she could get together with Zhang Xuan, no matter how close the two of them were.

However, Yu Shenqing had suddenly changed his attitude and run out to pursue Zhang Xuan, seemingly seeking reconciliation with the latter. In that instant, he felt the weight on his shoulders intensifying.

Since that was the case, he would have to make sure to pummel the thought of marrying Yu Fei-er out of Zhang Xuan first.

...

While the duo was discussing how they should deal with Zhang Xuan, Yu Shenqing had already reached the entrance of the royal palace. There, he only saw Yu Fei-er and Luo Qiqi standing in the vicinity, and Zhang Xuan was nowhere to be seen.

Yu Shenqing rushed forward to ask, “Where is Zhang shi?”

He might be the emperor of Hongyuan Empire, but Zhang Xuan, as the principal of the Master Teacher Academy, possessed far greater influence than him.

If he were to really offend Zhang Xuan, all the other party had to do was declare that the Master Teacher Academy would no longer protect the royal family, and the era of the Yu Clan would come to an end in less than half a month.

The main reason the Yu Clan had been able to retain control over Hongyuan Empire for so many years wasn't due to its strength but in deference to the Master Teacher Academy. Under the watchful gaze of the Master Teacher Academy, there was no one who would dare to brazenly initiate a coup d'état!

On top of that, while the presence of the Master Teacher Academy had raised the national power of Hongyuan Empire, it had also made Hongyuan Empire reliant on it. Out of a hundred officials possessing a cultivation level at the Ethereal Treading realm or above in the royal court, ninety-nine would be indebted to the Master Teacher Academy in one way or another. If a falling out were to occur between the Master Teacher Academy and the royal family, most would choose to side with the former!

As such, even though he, as the emperor, possessed an unparalleled standing in Hongyuan Empire, he still dared not cross the principal of the Master Teacher Academy.

This was reality!

He had thought that Zhang Xuan was only an insignificant figure in the Master Teacher Academy. Even if the latter had won the admiration of several school heads, there was still no need to fear him as his standing was equivalent to the Ten Great Master Teachers... But who could have known that he would be the succeeding principal!

Furthermore, he was nominated unanimously by the Ten Great Master Teachers and Mu shi!

Realizing what he had just done, Yu Shenqing immediately rushed out to seek reconciliation with Zhang Xuan.

“Teacher said that he has matters to attend to, so he left first...” Luo Qiqi said.

“He has left?” Yu Shenqing was stunned.

“Father, Zhang shi is my benefactor. Just how did he offend you that you had to send Musician Bai after him?” Yu Fei-er questioned her father angrily, unable to stand it any longer.

The others in the room might not be aware of what had happened, but as a talented soul cultivator, she was able to tell that it was Musician Bai who had made the first move, and Zhang shi had only retaliated out of rage.

It was clear that her father was behind this matter, otherwise there was no way that Musician Bai would dare make a move on a guest!

“I...” Yu Shenqing had no idea how he should explain this matter to his daughter.

After a moment of silence, he decided to come clean. “Before the start of the banquet, someone cleared our Thousand Tempering Soul Passageway at an unprecedented speed, devoured all of the spiritual energy within the Soul Tempering Hall, and destroyed our ancestral statues. I suspect that it was Zhang shi’s doing...”

“Impossible! Ever since arriving at the royal palace, Teacher has been with me, so how could he have caused destruction in the Soul Tempering Hall?” Luo Qiqi shook her head.

“I suspect that the culprit behind the destruction in the Soul Tempering Hall is a soul. Didn’t Zhang shi fall into a daze earlier on?” Yu Shenqing asked.

“The reason he was in a daze was because he had just found out that today is my birthday, and he was creating a soul cultivation technique for me...” interjected Yu Fei-er upon hearing her father’s words. Upon recalling this matter, her eyes couldn’t help but redden.

As she hadn’t informed Zhang shi that it was her birthday, the latter had probably only learned of it after arriving at the main hall. Yet, he still devoted his effort to creating a cultivation technique for her as a gift. But... he was still misunderstood like this!

In fact, he had even been assaulted in the midst of the banquet...

Wouldn’t his heart break from indignation?

“Creating a cultivation technique?” Yu Shenqing was surprised to hear those words.

“That’s right. Let me write down the cultivation technique for you so that you can see for yourself whether or not a person who created such a cultivation technique within a few hours could still have the time to wreak havoc in the Soul Tempering Hall!”

Gritting her teeth, Yu Fei-er took out a brush and a book and swiftly wrote down the set of cultivation techniques that

Zhang shi had imparted to her.

Taking the book, Yu Shenqing had barely read half a page when his body suddenly stiffened. Embarrassment flooded his face in the form of a crimson glow.

The set of soul cultivation techniques detailed in the book was extremely formidable, even more powerful than their Thousand Tempering Soul Refinement Art!

Even for a master teacher of Mu shi's caliber, it would take at least several decades to compile a technique like that. To create it on the spur of the moment, the other party must have put a lot of effort into it...

And yet, he had actually suspected the other party of destroying the Soul Tempering Hall!

In that instant, he felt as if he was an ingrate.

"This cultivation technique is tailored perfectly for the constitution of our Yu Clan..." After browsing through the entire book, Yu Shenqing felt so ashamed of himself that he was tempted to dive into a burrow.

The cultivation technique was built upon the special constitution that the members of the Yu Clan possessed, so outsiders were incapable of cultivating it. Thus, it was not even a possibility that this set of cultivation techniques had been taken from elsewhere.

If the members of their clan were to cultivate such a profound cultivation technique, the overall prowess of the Yu Clan would be raised by at least thirty percent!

Putting aside a Soul Tempering Hall, the value of this cultivation technique was worth at least a half of the entire royal palace!

In order to create such a profound cultivation technique, it was inevitable that the other party would have to fall into deep thought... Yet, he doubted the other party and had someone test him out, even demanding that he leave eventually...

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that he had gone overboard.

Yu Shenqing turned around and commanded, “Luo Fu, didn’t Zhang shi’s manor collapse? Send the best craftsmen in the empire to fix it immediately. Before daybreak, I want to see a manor that is even grander than the royal palace!”

“Yes!” The old eunuch hurriedly left to have the matter done.

A huge manor like Zhang Xuan’s would surely cost a bomb to repair and refurbish, but so what?

As long as they could repair their relationship with Zhang Xuan, it would be worth the expense!

...

Oblivious to Yu Shenqing’s intentions, Zhang Xuan finally reached Leiyuan Peak.

The mountain peak was covered in a thick layer of snow, creating a chilling atmosphere.

He entered the straw cottage where he first met the Byzantium Helios Beast and sat down.

It was still some time before the Zi hour[1], and Hu Yaoyao and the others hadn’t arrived yet. He could make use of this time to impart the Ethereal Treading realm Heaven’s Path Soul Art to his clone to allow him to raise his cultivation as well.

The clone appeared in the room and called out, “Main body!”

“What happened back then when you were disguising as Yang shi? How did the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall collapse as well?” Zhang Xuan asked.

The last time Zhang Xuan had met his clone was when the latter had appeared as Yang shi. As everything had happened too quickly, he didn’t have time to process everything his clone had done before the latter was returned to the Myriad Anthive Nest, thus breaking the telepathic connection between them.

As such, there were still certain aspects of the incident back then that he was unsure of.

“It was an effect created by Vicious through the use of Kong shi’s writing,” the clone responded.

In that instant, Zhang Xuan seemed to see everything fall into place.

His deduction hadn't been too far off. Through utilizing Kong shi's handwriting, Vicious had not only strengthened his aura, he had also managed to conceal the killing intent in his aura, converting it into a more orthodox and righteous form.

It was through borrowing Vicious' strength that his clone suddenly became so formidable, suppressing Mu shi and the Ten Great Master Teachers to the point that they dared not utter a word.

With a flick of his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out of the Book of Heaven's Path, where Vicious was sealed, and Kong shi's writings.

"I performed well, didn't I? See, I wasn't lying when I said that I would definitely be of great help to you if you were to let me devour Kong shi's writings..." As soon as Vicious saw Zhang Xuan, he immediately began claiming credit for his accomplishment.

"Devour Kong shi's writings? Dream on..."

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan opened up the scroll containing Kong shi's writings when he abruptly froze. Astonished, he exclaimed, "What is this?"

In the bamboo scroll, several hundred words of the initial three thousand had gone missing, leaving behind a smooth surface in their place. It was as if those words had never existed at all.

But he had definitely seen those words before, even undergoing the Soul Tempering of a Mentor's Calligraphy due to them...

"If you didn't let me devour those words, how could I possibly have produced such a powerful aura capable of destroying even formations and buildings?" Vicious replied.

"Devour... You devoured those words?" Zhang Xuan felt the world spinning around him.

He had known that his clone was not a person he could rely on, but who knew that the other party would allow Vicious to

do something like that?

That is Kong shi's personal handwriting! On top of that, a cultivation technique is hidden within it... With a portion of it devoured by this fool, how am I going to uncover the secret hidden within it?

"That's right!" Vicious nodded blankly, not understanding why Zhang Xuan was making such a huge fuss.

On the other hand, hearing Vicious admit to the matter, Zhang Xuan was on the verge of tears.

There was no master teacher who wouldn't treasure Kong shi's handwriting as if it was their life and pass it down to their descendants as a family heirloom. Yet, Vicious had actually devoured it... How was he supposed to face Kong shi if he were to meet the other party again in the future?

Just what was with this matter?

But what was done was done. There was no use blaming those two anymore.

Furthermore, the situation he had been facing then was extremely tricky, and there was no guarantee that he would have been able to get out of it without Yang shi's appearance.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan turned his gaze back to the bamboo scroll. Around a third of the words had disappeared, which meant that he could recreate the effect back in the Elder Hall another two times!

Forget it, it shouldn't matter anyway... Zhang Xuan shook his head as he consoled himself.

Kong shi's cultivation technique might be formidable, but as the cultivator of the Heaven's Path Divine Art, it didn't matter whether he obtained it or not.

Stowing the bamboo scroll and Vicious back into his storage ring, Zhang Xuan imparted the Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique to his clone before leaving his clone to cultivate using the Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

Once this was done, Zhang Xuan found himself with some additional time on hand, so he decided to take a look at his

current strength.

At the moment, his soul cultivation had already reached Ethereal Treading realm pinnacle, granting him a might of 20,000,000 ding. Factoring in the 17,000,000 ding from his zhenqi and 8,000,000 ding from his physical body, he wielded a total might of 45,000,000 ding.

In other words, his strength was on par with a Half-Saint primary stage cultivator!

For an Ethereal Treading realm primary stage to be able to rival a cultivator two realms stronger than him, probably not even the famed combat masters were capable of such a feat!

While checking on his body, he also noticed that his soul, with the recent breakthrough, was getting a little too powerful for his body, so he would have to slow down his soul cultivation for the time being.

After waiting a moment longer, Zhang Xuan heard the sound of aerial spirit beasts outside. Knowing that Hu Yaoyao and the others had arrived, he quickly hid his clone in the Myriad Anthive Nest and left the Byzantium Helios Beast at the back of the straw cottage before heading to the entrance to meet the others.

[1] Zi hour: 23:00 – 01:00

863 Sabertooth Spirit Tiger

“Zhang shi!”

As soon as he headed back to the entrance of the straw cottage, he saw Hu Yaoyao, Xue Zhenyang, and the others stepping off the back of a massive spirit beast.

Half a month ago, they had still been the domineering and powerful leaders of the four most powerful student factions in the academy. However, at this moment, as if little chicks meeting a mighty eagle, they were devoid of the arrogance that they held before, and a hint of fear could be felt from their body language.

They might still have been considered rivals before, but at this instant, they had become nothing more than juniors to him. They couldn't pull their weight before him even if they wanted to.

“Zhang shi, are you ready to set forth now?” Hu Yaoyao asked.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“Great. Let's get on the spirit beast then!” Hu Yaoyao beckoned Zhang Xuan onto the spirit beast that they had been riding on a moment ago as she prepared to leap on herself.

“Let's ride on another one, that one over there is too slow...” Zhang Xuan shook his head as he sent a signal through his mind. A moment later, an ape-like spirit beast emerged from the back of the straw cottage.

“Senior Byzantium Helios?”

“The old principal's tamed beast?”

“Didn't Senior Byzantium Helios go missing?”

Hu Yaoyao, Xue Zhenyang, and Long Cangyue leaped in shock as they stared at the young man before them as if they were gazing at a monster.

They were all direct disciples of the school heads of the Master Teacher Academy, so they were privy to the news regarding Senior Byzantium Helios's disappearance as well.... How could he be with Zhang Shi?

Furthermore, from the looks of it, the relationship between the two of them didn't seem to be simple.

In contrast to the shock of the others, Dong Xin remained composed.

She had personally seen how Senior Byzantium Helios had addressed him as master, and she also knew that the Ten Great Master Teachers and Mu Shi had nominated the young man before her as the next principal as well.

However, due to the grave importance of this matter, she didn't reveal it to anyone.

"If we ride on him, we should be able to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits and return within three days!" said Zhang Xuan, before turning to the Byzantium Helios Beast and instructing, "Byzantium Helios, we will be counting on you."

"Yes, Master!" the Byzantium Helios Beast nodded.

With crisp echoes from the bones throughout its body, its physique immediately grew threefold, turning its originally large physique into something resembling a mini mountain.

After which, it walked forward to take the room on top of Dong Xin's spirit beast and placed it on its back.

"Let's set off!" Zhang Xuan said as he leaped onto the Byzantium Helios Beast's back.

On the other hand, watching as the old principal's saint beast of the academy turn into a mount, Hu Yaoyao, Xue Zhenyang, and Long Cangyue were completely flabbergasted, and they couldn't help but think that either the world had gone mad or they hadn't awoken from their dreams yet.

They had heard of how prideful Senior Byzantium Helios was, so it was hard to believe that not only would he acknowledge Zhang Xuan as his master, he would even... willingly serve as a mount! Even though they were witnessing the sight

personally with their own eyes, they couldn't help but find it inconceivable.

Even after they had entered the room on the Byzantium Helios Beast's back and soared into the clouds, they were still unable to recover from the blow.

After a long moment of silence, Xue Zhenyang suddenly recalled something and exclaimed in astonishment, "My teacher told me that the person who found Senior Byzantium Helios would be the next principal of our academy!"

His teacher, Xu Changqing, was the head of the Martial Arts School. The other party had once told him that Mu shi had spread the word that he would decide the succeeding principal based on whoever found the Byzantium Helios Beast first. For the Byzantium Helios Beast to have acknowledged Zhang Xuan as its master, could it be that...

"I was forced into it. Sigh, I wouldn't have accepted it if there was any other way around it!" Seeing that Xue Zhenyang had figured it out, Zhang Xuan thought that there was no need to hide the matter from them, so he shook his head with a sigh.

If it wasn't for the principal's privilege to access all of the books available in the academy, he would have never accepted this troublesome role.

As the principal, his actions would be publicly scrutinized, and any problem that occurred in the Master Teacher Academy would be attributed to his incompetence.

It was not as if this was anything good, so there was no need to make a huge fuss over the matter.

"You were... forced into it?"

"You wouldn't have accepted it if there was any way around it?"

Hu Yaoyao, Xue Zhenyang, and Long Cangyue rolled their eyes upon hearing Zhang Xuan's words.

It is actually possible to be forced into becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy?

Why can't such fortune come to us instead?

We would have loved to be forced into it as well...

...

Putting the matter aside for the moment, Zhang Xuan turned to Hu Yaoyao and instructed, "Hu Yaoyao, show me your battle technique!"

Since he had promised Wu Yangzi to take care of his descendant, he had no intention of renegeing on his words.

"Alright!" Knowing that Zhang Xuan was going to offer her some pointers, Hu Yaoyao nodded and began executing her strongest battle technique.

A moment later, after gaining a thorough understanding of the flaws in Hu Yaoyao's cultivation, Zhang Xuan began offering her some pointers.

It must be said that Hu Yaoyao was a rare gem. Not only was she knowledgeable, she possessed extraordinary talent, and the foundation of her cultivation was extremely stable as well. With Zhang Xuan's guidance, she improved swiftly, especially in the field of terpsichorean arts. With her alluring figure, even a Half-Saint expert could be left in a trance after watching her dance.

Hu Yaoyao's rapid improvement had left the others with an itch in their hearts, and eventually, they could no longer hold back the urge to consult Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan also offered them his pointers without any reservations, and the other three improved swiftly as well.

While they were still a significant stretch from making the breakthrough to Half-Saint, they did manage to further reinforce their cultivation. In their current states, as long as they were to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruit, it was almost a certain that they would be able to make a breakthrough.

...

Half a day passed in a flash.

By the time they were arriving in the vicinity of the Scarlet Firefly Fruit, the sun had just begun to rise from the eastern horizon.

Even though it was in line with Zhang Xuan's estimation, he still couldn't help but be amazed by the Byzantium Helios Beast's speed. As expected of a Saint 2-dan spirit beast, its speed and endurance were truly on a different level from spirit beasts.

"Let's stop here!"

Under Dong Xin's directions, the Byzantium Helios Beast landed right outside a mountain valley.

"Senior Byzantium Helios, I think it would be best for you to remain here. The Scarlet Firefly Fruit is guarded by two spirit beasts, and if they sense your presence by any chance, I fear that they might destroy the fruit out of desperation after realizing that they won't be able to maintain possession of it," Dong Xin said.

The instincts of a spirit beast should never be underestimated. The moment they sensed the Byzantium Helios Beast's presence, they might choose to take a position close to the Scarlet Firefly Fruit and hold it hostage, threatening to destroy it should they approach.

That would put them in an extremely disadvantageous position.

"I also don't think that it is a feasible plan to get past those two spirit beasts by brute force. Due to our lower cultivation, they won't view us as a huge threat and will be less wary around us. Our best shot at obtaining the fruits is to exploit their possible negligence toward us to sneak past their defense and obtain them discreetly," Long Cangyue said.

This was the plan they had derived after many rounds of discussion based on the intelligence they had gathered. Otherwise, they could have simply invited any of the elders over to help them overpower those two spirit beasts. There was no need for them to seek help from a nemesis.

"I am confident at masking my presence such that they won't be able to find me," the Byzantium Helios Beast said assuredly.

As a Saint 2-dan saint beast, it was an easy feat for it to conceal its aura from spirit beasts.

“It isn’t that easy... Take a closer look at the valley ahead!” Dong Xin said grimly.

“The valley?” Zhang Xuan and Byzantium Helios Beast turned their sights to the valley ahead.

The valley was extremely narrow, reminiscent of a sealed box. Perhaps due to the presence of the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, it was rich in spiritual energy like a blessed land.

The first thing that the duo noticed upon looking into the valley was that it was filled with a particular flower. The flower carried a tinge of red, as if embarrassed to be looked at.

A certain plant surfaced in Zhang Xuan’s mind, and a deep frown emerged on his face.

“Are those Crimson Coy Flowers?”

The Crimson Coy Flower was similar to the mimosa in his previous life. Upon coming into contact with foreign objects, it would change its color depending on the strength of the intruder.

In other words, it would change into a differing color should a Saint approach the valley.

This was also why this flower was a common ingredient in formulating medicine used to gauge the cultivation of an individual.

“Indeed, those are Crimson Coy Flowers!” Dong Xin said with a bitter smile.

“I see...” Zhang Xuan nodded.

The Crimson Coy Flowers were extremely sensitive plants. Even if the Byzantium Helios Beast was able to conceal its aura perfectly, the flowers might still be able to gauge its true strength through its movements and other aspects.

Of course, it was unlikely for the two spirit beasts to destroy the Scarlet Firefly Fruits just because a Saint realm expert was in the area, but this was a risk that they couldn’t afford to take.

After getting a clearer glimpse of the situation, Zhang Xuan waved his hand and instructed, “Byzantium Helios, you should rest for the time being then. Don’t worry, nothing bad will happen. Besides, it won’t be too late for you to make a move if we really encounter danger.”

“Yes, Master!” the Byzantium Helios Beast replied.

After which, it flew into the distance, and once it was out of sight, it returned to the Myriad Anthive Nest.

Given Zhang Xuan’s current strength, there was no cultivator beneath Half-Saint that was a match for him. Besides, he could keep the Byzantium Helios Beast by his side via the Myriad Anthive Nest and release it immediately if they encountered a difficult situation, so there was nothing to worry about.

“Let’s enter!”

Without any hesitation, the group began heading into the valley.

As soon as they stepped into the valley, a ripple of color began to spread across the Scarlet Coy Flowers, as if transmitting information of some kind.

“What are the spirit beasts guarding the Scarlet Firefly Fruits?” Zhang Xuan asked as the group advanced deeper into the valley.

“They are both Chrysalis realm pinnacle Sabertooth Spirit Tigers!” Hu Yaoyao replied.

“Sabertooth Spirit Tigers? No wonder...” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

It was not without reason that the Sabertooth Spirit Tiger was famed as the strongest spirit beast beneath Half-Saint. Even though they were Chrysalis realm pinnacle experts as well, Hu Yaoyao and the others were hardly a match for a single Sabertooth Spirit Tiger, let alone two.

Defended by those two spirit beasts, it would indeed be extremely tricky to get to the Scarlet Firefly Fruits.

Of course, this wasn’t a problem for Zhang Xuan.

If a fight were to really occur, he could easily settle it with two punches.

“That isn’t the only problem. Those two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers are very cunning too. Regardless of whatever happens outside, one of them will always remain behind to guard the Scarlet Firefly Fruits. If anything were to happen, that Sabertooth Spirit Tiger might choose to destroy the entire tree... Thus, we can’t just rely on brute force for this matter. We have to find a way to lure the both of them out simultaneously,” Dong Xin said.

She had spent some time in this valley gathering intelligence for the operation, so she had gained a rough understanding of the habits of the two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers.

“Lure the both of them out simultaneously?” Realizing how tricky this matter was, Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. Thus, we prepared the Origin Heavy Water that they are extremely fond of. However, due to our limited resources, we were only able to procure four bottles,” Dong Xin said with a bitter smile.

Usually, when freshmen enrolled in the academy, their student factions were able to earn sufficient spirit stones to purchase even several dozen bottles of Origin Heavy Water. However, the freshmen this year had all chosen to join the Xuanxuan Faction, so they had failed to earn anything at all. On top of that, they even had some of the senior students in their factions betraying them for the Xuanxuan Faction...

As a result, they’d had to fork out from their own pockets, and altogether, they only had sufficient money to acquire four bottles.

“Four bottles of Origin Heavy Water?” Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

If he could acquire just one of those, he would be able to cultivate the Third Incandescence of his Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body.

“How do you intend to use the Origin Heavy Water?” Zhang Xuan asked.

After a moment of hesitation, Dong Xin revealed her plan. “The Sabertooth Spirit Tiger is extremely sensitive to the scent of Origin Heavy Water. Our plan is to open a bottle to lure the first Sabertooth Spirit Tiger out. Once the first one leaves, we will use the same trick to lure the second one out as well...

“Of course, we will have to ascertain that the Scarlet Firefly Fruits have matured first. Otherwise, our efforts will be futile.”

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It is unlikely that your plan will work.

“Once the Scarlet Firefly Fruits mature, even if the two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers don’t consume them directly, they will surely harvest them and escape swiftly. Ultimately, no matter how alluring the Origin Heavy Water is to them, it can’t compete with an opportunity to achieve a breakthrough to Half-Saint. Besides, I think you are underestimating the intelligence of the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers. They already possess intelligence on par with humans, so it is unlikely that they will fall for such a simple ploy.”

Only a step away from reaching Half-Saint, those two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers were more than capable of keeping their instincts in check. It would be difficult to get past them with such a crude plan.

“What should we do then?” Dong Xin asked anxiously.

The others turned their gazes to Zhang Xuan as well.

“I do have a plan in mind, but I will need your Origin Heavy Water,” Zhang Xuan said.

864 Someone Before Us

“Zhang shi has an idea in mind?” Hu Yaoyao and the others traded glances, and their eyes lit up simultaneously.

As valuable as Origin Heavy Water was, its value couldn't match the maturing Scarlet Firefly Fruits. As master teachers, they could tell that their plan was unrefined, but limited by their cultivation and the resources they had at hand, they were unable to find a better plan.

If Zhang Xuan had an idea, that would be for the best.

“Of course!” Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

“That is great!” Recalling how the young man before them was able to tame over four hundred spirit beasts in two hours, as well as become the master of the Byzantium Helios Beast, the four of them couldn't help but tremble in anticipation.

“Here you go!” Dong Xin and the others flicked their wrists and took out a jade bottle each.

It seemed that they had all agreed on purchasing a bottle each and gathering them together after arriving in the valley.

Taking the jade bottles from them, Zhang Xuan uncorked the lid of one of them, and he immediately felt the rich water attribute energy contained within. He could feel his cells quivering in excitement, seemingly desiring the fluid within the bottle to cultivate the Third Incandescence.

“Just wait and see, I will lure those two fellows out!”

However, knowing that this wasn't the time for him to cultivate, Zhang Xuan stowed the jade bottles into his storage ring.

Given how valuable the Origin Heavy Water was, it would be a huge waste to use it to lure the Sabertooth Spirit Tiger away. In any case, he did have another plan in mind to lure out the spirit beasts that wouldn't require the Origin Heavy Water.

In fact, if he wanted to, he could easily sneak in and make it out with the entire tree as his soul.

Since that was the case, there was really no need to waste good Origin Heavy Water on this matter. It could be put to better use in his hands.

But of course, he would make sure to compensate the four of them properly for the Origin Heavy Water too. A compilation on the insights of achieving a breakthrough to Half-Saint to guarantee them a successful breakthrough should be sufficient.

Considering that they were using the Origin Heavy Water to bet on the possibility of obtaining the Scarlet Firefly Fruit, which only raised the possibility of achieving a breakthrough to Half-Saint, a compilation that could guarantee them a successful breakthrough was definitely worth more than the price of the Origin Heavy Water.

After putting away the Origin Heavy Water, Zhang Xuan asked, “Right, can you share your full plan with me? I can help you analyze it to determine its feasibility!”

“Our plan is actually rather simple. After luring those two fellows out, we will trap them in a formation, quickly obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, and leave,” Dong Xin said.

“Trap them in a formation? If you want to trap a Chrysalis realm pinnacle Sabertooth Spirit Tiger, the formation must at least be grade-6. On top of that, it must be capable of activating swiftly... Do you have such a formation plate on hand?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

“Un. Just in case an accident occurs, the four of us have prepared a formation plate each, namely a Confinement Formation, Illusory Formation, Beguilement Formation, and Slaughter Formation!”

Since they were going to collaborate with one another, there was no need to hide this matter from Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “It should be possible to trap the Sabertooth Spirit Tiger with the grade-6 formation plates you have on hand, but it isn’t a foolproof measure. You will have to pump your zhenqi into the formation to sustain it, but

considering the overwhelming strength of the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers, you won't be able to hold on for long under their thrashing... It is uncertain if you will be able to buy sufficient time to procure the Scarlet Firefly Fruit and escape before they break out, so the plan doesn't seem to be particularly reliable.”

The main advantage that a formation plate provided was that even those who didn't understand formations could activate and use it as well. However, it had its fair share of disadvantages compared to typical formations, too. Unless one could create a compound formation of it with a Spirit Gathering Formation, one would have to activate and sustain it using one's zhenqi.

The amount of zhenqi a cultivator possessed was limited, so while formation plates might be useful in alleviating dire situations temporarily, their effectiveness was limited in the long-term.

The Sabertooth Spirit Tigers possessed extraordinary strength, so it was hard to say whether or not the formation plates could stall them long enough to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits.

It was no wonder they eventually chose to find him. With this plan, their probability of success was probably even less than twenty percent.

On the other hand, hearing Zhang Xuan's words, their faces turned red.

They also knew that there was a problem with their plan, but there was no alternative they could think of.

After a moment of hesitation, Hu Yaoyao spoke up with gritted teeth. “Zhang shi, if we obtain these Scarlet Firefly Fruits, we are willing to take only one each, and the rest will go to you...”

The other three nodded in agreement.

They knew that it would have been extremely improbable for them to succeed, so they felt embarrassed to share an equal split of the Scarlet Firefly Fruits with him.

In any case, their goal was just to make the breakthrough to Half-Saint. As long as they could succeed, it mattered not

whether they obtained one Scarlet Firefly Fruit or two.

Zhang Xuan shook its head. “Let’s obtain them first before talking about that...”

It was impractical to be talking about the distribution when they hadn’t even obtained them yet.

Understanding this logic, the others nodded, and the group continued proceeding forward.

“The area where the Scarlet Firefly Fruits are located is just around this bend. Let’s proceed carefully,” warned Dong Xin as she took a look at the surroundings.

The others nodded as they advanced with bated breaths.

While the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers would know that there were intruders due to the presence of the Scarlet Coy Flowers, as long as the intruders didn’t possess strength beyond them, they were unlikely to be alarmed. As long as they were to conceal themselves well and figure out a perfect opportunity to strike, they would still have a shot at success.

Advancing for a little longer, just as they were about to reach the end of the narrow path in the valley, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows suddenly shot up in alarm. “Something’s wrong!”

Seeing Zhang Xuan come to an abrupt halt, the others swiftly stopped in their footsteps as well.

“What’s wrong?”

However, Zhang Xuan didn’t reply to their questions. Instead, he walked over to a nearby boulder and squatted down.

A moment later, he gestured them over and said, “Take a look at this...”

Hu Yaoyao and the others headed over with doubtful expressions, and behind the boulder, they noticed slight traces of fresh soil that were slightly different from their surroundings. It was barely discernible; they wouldn’t have noticed it if they weren’t paying close attention, but the fresh soil didn’t seem to belong to the valley.

“This is...” The others were slightly perplexed by the sight before them.

“This valley seems to be suffering from dry weather, as we can tell from the dry soil in the area. However, these bits of soil carry a slight bit of dampness with them... If I am not mistaken, I believe that someone has entered the valley ahead of us!” Zhang Xuan revealed his deduction.

He had been keeping a lookout on his surroundings using the Eye of Insight, and as inconspicuous as the traces of fresh soil were, he was still able to easily find them and determine their origin.

“Someone has entered the valley ahead of us?”

On the other hand, hearing Zhang Xuan’s words, the faces of the others immediately warped in shock.

The main reason they were so persistent about the Scarlet Firefly Fruits here was because there was no one else aware of their existence. If the news regarding them had spread somehow, it would complicate things.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded. “Judging from the soil, it seems there are two of them, and it has been less than ten minutes since they passed this point. Also, the stronger of the duo seems to be... a Half-Saint realm cultivator!”

“You are able to tell their cultivation just by these soil traces?”

Everyone was stunned.

Was he a fortune teller?

It might be possible to gauge the time when the soil was left behind by its dampness, but how in the world did he manage to deduce the strength of those who had entered too?

“I have been paying close attention to the surroundings, and I didn’t notice any such soil traces behind us. In other words, the other party must have flown in and landed here. I can still feel slight traces of his zhenqi in the surroundings, and through that, it is not impossible to deduce his cultivation,” Zhang Xuan replied.

At Half-Saint, a cultivator had already comprehended the ability of basic flight. However, having yet to open the Zhukong acupoint, their flight would be unstable, and zhenqi would leak from their acupoints as well.

If the other party had not stopped here, the leaked zhenqi might have been so faint that it would have been nigh impossible to discern anything. However, as the other party had landed here, a trace of his zhenqi lingered in the area, allowing one to deduce his cultivation.

“Incredible...”

The crowd couldn't help but be awed.

Even though they were master teachers as well, in terms of their meticulousness and analytical ability, they were still far too lacking compared to Zhang Xuan.

Xue Zhenyang's face suddenly turned grim. “If a Half-Saint is here... will the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers destroy the fruits?”

If a Half-Saint was there, the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers would surely have been alarmed. If the spirit beasts were to destroy the fruits out of desperation, they would have made the trip in vain.

Hu Yaoyao shook her head. “I think we should focus our attention on figuring out the identity of those who came earlier than us. If they obtain the fruits before us, it would be no different from them being destroyed to us...”

There was some truth in her words.

If the other party were to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits before them, were they supposed to snatch the fruits from the other party's hands?

As master teachers, they had to conduct themselves appropriately. If they were to be found guilty of snatching a treasure from the hands of another, they would be severely punished by the Master Teacher Pavilion.

The others nodded in agreement as they continued to advance discreetly. After turning at the end of the meandering path, a vast plot of land suddenly unfolded before them.

It was at least several thousand square meters, as if someone had forcefully dug out this space in the midst of the valley. At the end of the path, lying against the cliff face, was a massive cavern. The Scarlet Firefly Fruits were inside it.

Through the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan could see dense spiritual energy congregated within the cavern, puffing out from time to time.

“There is indeed someone ahead of us!” Dong Xin frowned.

Following her gaze, there were two silhouettes hiding behind a boulder outside of the cavern, seemingly fiddling with something in their hands.

“A Half-Saint and a Chrysalis realm expert!” Upon discerning the cultivation of the duo before them, the four of them couldn’t help but glance at Zhang Xuan in admiration once more.

It was exactly as he had deduced.

“The clothes that they are wearing... are those master teacher robes? But why are they different to ours?” Xue Zhenyang frowned.

It was after Xue Zhenyang’s remark that everyone turned their attention to the clothes of the duo. Unlike the normal loose-fitting master teacher robes, the gray robes they wore seemed to be tighter and more fitting. From their side profile, they could vaguely make out a master teacher emblem pinned on their chest, but unlike the usual soothing and magnanimous aura it carried, the emblem they donned felt sharp and aggressive. It seemed as if their eyes would be pricked if they were to stare at it a moment longer.

After a moment of contemplation, Long Cangyue said, “Even if their robes are different from ours, I can still sense that they are master teachers from the unique imprint on their emblems... However, it doesn’t seem like they are from Hongyuan Empire. I know nearly all of the experts of their caliber in the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy and Master Teacher Pavilion, but neither looks familiar to me.”

“Un.” Xue Zhenyang and the others nodded in agreement as well.

As elites of the Master Teacher Academy, they’d had the privilege of meeting many of the top master teachers in Hongyuan Empire. If those two had been from Hongyuan Empire as well, they should have been able to recognize them. Since they couldn’t, chances were that they were from a foreign land.

In any case, the mountain range they were in was already beyond Hongyuan Empire’s territory, so it wasn’t surprising to see foreign master teachers in the area.

“The convention among master teachers regarding the distribution of artifacts is on a first come first serve basis. Once someone has obtained the treasure, the others are not to snatch it by force. Even if they really wish to obtain the treasure, they will have to do so via proper means,” Dong Xin said.

In a scenario where many master teachers were going for the same artifact, regardless of means, the first one to obtain it would be considered its owner.

Malicious actions such as killing the person in possession of the item to snatch it were strictly forbidden.

Otherwise, if master teachers were to wrestle one another to death over artifacts, what right would they have to preach to others?

Of course, the side that failed to obtain the artifact could negotiate with the one in possession of the artifact regarding its distribution by offering something in exchange for it or through an official duel... However, if the one in possession of the artifact were to reject all negotiations, there was nothing that could be done.

“It will be over once they lay their hands on the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, so we have to obtain the fruits before them...” Hu Yaoyao said with a grim expression.

A moment later, Hu Yaoyao’s eyebrows shot up and she asked doubtfully, “What are they doing?”

Ahead of them, the duo seemed to be in no hurry to rush into the cavern either. The stronger of the duo had lit up an incense and was discreetly manipulating his zhenqi to blow the incense toward the cavern.

“If I’m not mistaken, that item should be Soulshock Incense!” Dong Xin said.

“Soulshock Incense?” Hu Yaoyao and the others asked doubtfully.

“Un. The smoke produced by the incense contains a substance that can beguile a soul with hallucinations. They must be using it to incapacitate the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers before stealing the Scarlet Firefly Fruits!” Dong Xin explained.

“However, that item doesn’t discriminate between friend and foe... If they fill the cavern with the smoke, aren’t they worried that they will fall under the effects of the Soulshock Incense as well?”

865 Crossing Hands

The Soulshock Incense was crafted using several hundred unique medicinal herbs, and its effects were so potent that it was effective even on Chrysalis realm cultivators. However, the Soulshock Incense didn't discriminate between friend and foe. Even if they could blow the smoke away from them now, they would still be affected by it once they entered the cavern.

“Every toxin has a counteracting antidote to it. Most likely, they must have concocted a pairing antidote and consumed it beforehand,” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

There was always an antidote to a poison, no matter how potent it was, needless to say a substance that only induced hallucinations.

“Un!” The others nodded in agreement.

“What should we do then? Once the smoke fills the cavern, the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers will surely be knocked out, and they will be free to obtain the fruits!” Dong Xin exclaimed anxiously.

The other party had a Half-Saint expert, so it would be impossible for them to get to the Scarlet Firefly Fruits faster than the other party once the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers were knocked out.

After a moment of deep thought, Zhang Xuan replied, “We will have to be the first to strike then...”

Since they were unable to outrun or outfight the other party, they would just have to be the first one to make a move!

“Be the first to strike?” The others were perplexed, unsure of what Zhang Xuan meant.

The other party was right in front of the cavern, and the cavern was currently filled with the smoke of the Soulshock Incense as well. Even if they were to rush in now, not only would they be unable to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, they might even

succumb to hallucinations as well, putting them in a vulnerable position.

“Wait for me here. If anything happens, leave the area immediately. Remember, your safety comes first. I will circle the area to see if I can find an opportunity to sneak into the cavern without them noticing,” Zhang Xuan instructed.

“You want to sneak into the cavern?”

The cavern was only that big, and the duo was right before the cavern. How could he possibly sneak in without the other party noticing?

“Don’t worry about that, leave it to me...” Zhang Xuan reassured them before diving to the side.

In a few moments, he had already disappeared from their sights.

“This...” After Zhang Xuan’s departure, Dong Xin and the others glanced at one another with bewilderment reflected in their eyes, unsure of what to do.

A long moment later, Hu Yaoyao sighed deeply and said, “Let’s just follow Zhang shi’s instructions. Since he has already said those words, he must have an idea in mind...”

In the current circumstances, there was nothing they could do. Their only option was to follow Zhang Xuan’s commands.

Considering the various miracles that the latter had produced before, perhaps he might just be able to exceed their expectations once more and obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits ahead of the duo.

...

After getting out of the others’ sight, Zhang Xuan hid in a discreet location before drawing his soul out.

Under the present circumstances, the only way for him to sneak into the cavern discreetly was through his soul.

As for what he said about circling the area and finding an opportunity, that was only an excuse for him to hide out of view.

Floating in the air, Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before whipping out a bottle of Origin Heavy Water. He fed it to his body and drew out several surges of Heaven's Path zhenqi from his dantian before stowing his body into the Myriad Anthive Nest.

His physical body had already achieved the Mind of Void, allowing it to cultivate instinctively without his soul. Since that was the case, it would be a waste not to make full use of the ability to cultivate the Third Incandescence, especially since it wouldn't interfere in his mission anyway.

Hu!

Holding his storage ring up with his soul energy, Zhang Xuan's soul traveled silently alongside the cliff face toward the cavern.

There were many trees and shrubs growing alongside the cliff face, all the way to the cavern, so it wasn't too difficult for Zhang Xuan to move his small storage ring discreetly among them.

On top of that, Zhang Xuan's soul had reached Ethereal Treading realm pinnacle, granting him greater control over his soul energy. If he were to conceal his aura, there was no way a Half-Saint would be able to notice him.

Hu!

By making use of a temporary lapse in attention of the duo, Zhang Xuan managed to dart into the cavern with his storage ring without alarming anyone.

Heaving a sigh of relief, he began to scan his surroundings.

The interior of the cavern was spacious and deep. From where he stood, he couldn't see the other end.

At this moment, there was already a light layer of smoke drifting in the cavern, and with just the slightest inhalation, one would fall into a deep trance.

If it had been before, even if Zhang Xuan had cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art, he would still have needed to proceed warily around such poison. However, after his soul had mixed

with Wei Ruyan's and gained the properties of the Poison Soul Constitution, such poison no longer posed a threat to him.

Advancing deeper into the cavern, Zhang Xuan soon encountered a bizarre-looking tree.

It had a twisted tree trunk with a thickness roughly equivalent to an average bowl with vine-like branches stretching from it. Hanging on those vine-like branches were golden leaves and several light-red fruits.

It seems the fruits haven't matured yet... Upon taking a look, Zhang Xuan could tell that the fruits were still several days away from maturity.

The distinctive trait of a mature Scarlet Firefly Fruit was its bright scarlet color and the emanation of a glow reminiscent of a firefly. However, it was currently only light-red in color.

Just as Dong Xin and the others had deduced, it would still take from a week to half a month before they were ready to be harvested.

Standing on guard right before the tree was a massive Sabertooth Spirit Tiger. It had an impressive body, which was two meters tall and five meters long, and it carried an oppressive aura that seemed to stifle one's breath.

The other Sabertooth Spirit Tiger was prowling warily around the tree with its gaze frequently turning to the entrance of the cavern. It seemed to have realized that there were enemies camping outside, and nervousness and apprehension were reflected in its eyes. It seemed to be debating whether or not it should simply devour the unripe Scarlet Firefly Fruits and escape swiftly.

The smoke of the Soulshock Incense had yet to reach this part of the cavern, so the two large tigers still retained their consciousness.

It seems Dong Xin's intelligence is spot on... Zhang Xuan nodded in approval.

There were indeed ten fruits on the tree, and the two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers were at Chrysalis realm pinnacle as well.

To be able to gather such detailed intelligence, Dong Xin must have scouted the cavern as well.

While the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers were extremely wary, it was inevitable that they would lower their guards from time to time, especially while they were tending to their fundamental needs. Furthermore, the fruits were still far from maturity then, so they wouldn't have been as wary as they were now.

With Dong Xin's Chrysalis realm pinnacle cultivation, even if she wasn't a match for the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers, she was still capable of sneaking in discreetly to scout the area.

There are two ways I can proceed now. First, I can release the Byzantium Helios Beast, kill these two spirit beasts, and claim possession of the Scarlet Firefly Fruits. This is the easiest and most direct method, but I will risk exposing my means as a soul oracle and the existence of the Myriad Anthive Nest. Second, I can find a way to hasten the maturity of the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, harvest them, and swiftly escape without anyone noticing. If so, I can avoid a confrontation with the two master teachers, thus sparing me a great deal of trouble... Zhang Xuan thought.

Naturally, the easiest solution would be to release the Byzantium Helios Beast and swiftly get rid of the two tigers. However, it would be hard to explain how he had managed to sneak into the cavern without their notice and where the Byzantium Helios Beast had come from.

The second method it is then! After giving the matter some thought, Zhang Xuan still felt that the second method would be safer.

I will have to knock these two fellows out first...

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan's soul retreated slightly behind and drew the smoke of the Soulshock Incense in with his soul energy.

The Scarlet Firefly Fruit should only be harvested upon maturity, and in order to hasten the maturity of the Scarlet Firefly Fruit, Zhang Xuan would have to bring out his physical

body to utilize his Heaven's Path zhenqi. Thus, he would have to incapacitate the two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers first.

Under the control of his soul, the smoke of the Soulshock Incense swiftly gathered around the tree. Too focused on the cultivators loitering outside the cavern, the two spirit beasts didn't expect to be poisoned. Unknowingly, they took a few breaths in, and their bodies began shaking uncontrollably. In the blink of an eye, they were already hallucinating.

After waiting for a few moments to confirm that the two fellows were incapacitated, Zhang Xuan rushed forward to the tree, took out his physical body, and returned his soul to it.

Flicking his wrist, he took out a gourd of Earth Vein Spirit Essence and dripped it on the fruits while pumping his Heaven's Path zhenqi into them.

The reason Zhang Xuan dared to go in there without having to worry about being late for the inauguration ceremony, despite Hu Yaoyao saying that she was unsure when the Scarlet Firefly Fruit would mature, was due to this ability of his.

He had learned of this method when he had tried to hasten the maturity of the Ten-leafed Flower back in You Xu's residence previously. Under the influx of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence and Heaven's Path zhenqi, the light-red fruits swiftly deepened in color, and a glow gradually emerged within them. Before long, a refreshing fragrance began to permeate the surroundings.

The fruits have matured! Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

He swiftly harvested the ten Scarlet Firefly Fruits and placed them in a jade box before stowing them into his storage ring. After which, he drew his soul out of his body and placed his body into the Myriad Anthive Nest before storing the nest in his storage ring as well.

After all that was done, he took a glance at the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers once more and saw that they were still shaking on their feet, plagued by hallucinations. Heaving a sigh of relief, he swiftly picked up his ring and rushed out of the cavern.

Shortly after he escaped from the cavern, he saw the two master teachers who had lit the Soulshock Incense earlier walking over, seemingly trying to check if they had successfully knocked out the Sabertooth Spirit Tigers.

With a slight smile, Zhang Xuan quickly left the premises with his storage ring. He hurriedly searched for a discreet area with no one around before letting his body out and returning to it.

In the time he had spent stealing the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, his physical body had successfully cultivated the Third Incandescence of the Quintuple Incandescence Golden Body.

His physical strength had doubled, rising from the original 8,000,000 ding to 16,000,000 ding.

If exerted in unison with his soul and zhenqi cultivation, he would be able to bring out a combined might of 53,000,000 ding, which was comparable to the strength of a Half-Saint pinnacle cultivator!

(Half-Saint primary stage 40,000,000 ding; intermediate stage 44,000,000 ding; advanced stage 48,000,000 ding; pinnacle 52,000,000 ding)

Feeling the overwhelming power coursing through his body, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but tremble with excitement.

For an Ethereal Treading realm primary stage cultivator to possess strength on par with a Half-Saint pinnacle cultivator, that would terrify the bejesus out of others!

That was a gap that couldn't be justified by just talent; it could only be said to be a miracle!

Alright, I should return now... Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan stood up and returned to the area where he had last seen Hu Yaoyao and the others.

However, just as he was approaching the area, he suddenly felt a violent shockwave rippling in the surroundings.

This is bad...

Narrowing his eyes in alarm, Zhang Xuan picked up his pace and rushed over. A few breaths later, he saw several cultivators battling one another intensely in a clearing.

Xue Zhenyang, Hu Yaoyao, Dong Xin, and Long Cangyue were fighting one of the duo they had encountered earlier. They executed powerful attacks with varying styles, but their opponent, despite fighting the four of them simultaneously, didn't seem to be falling in defeat. On the contrary, he easily neutralized their attacks and even cornered the four of them to the point that they had to execute their strongest techniques just to hold their ground.

It's the Chrysalis realm pinnacle fellow? Zhang Xuan took a look at their opponent and frowned.

If their opponent had been the Half-Saint expert, it would be understandable for the four of them to still be in a disadvantageous position despite putting their strength together. However, their opponent was the Chrysalis realm pinnacle master teacher, possessing cultivation equal to theirs!

The four of them were famed geniuses of the Master Teacher Academy, and there were barely any cultivators of the same cultivation realm who could defeat them.

Yet, for them to be cornered even in a four-on-one battle against a fellow peer, was this really happening?

Their opponent was a little... way too powerful!

Glancing to the side, Zhang Xuan saw the Half-Saint cultivator leaning against a boulder as he gazed at the duel impassively, seemingly unworried that his companion would lose at all.

It seemed that the other party had absolute confidence in the strength of his companion.

Knowing that Hu Yaoyao and the others would lose tragically should the duel continue as it was, Zhang Xuan stepped forward and bellowed, "Stop!"

866 Zhang Xuan's Prowess

“Zhang shi...”

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, the eyes of Hu Yaoyao and the others immediately lit up. They immediately attempted to retreat from the battle to unite with him, but their opponent harrumphed coldly. “Do you think that you can stop this battle just because you want to?”

Hu hu!

The opponent brandished the sword in his hand, and a powerful might immediately chased after Hu Yaoyao and the others, leaving them no choice but to turn around to counterattack.

However, their counterattack was still a little late, and the opponent's slash left them with a deep cut on their arms.

What swift swordsmanship! Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

The opponent's swordsmanship wasn't exceptionally profound, but it made up for its simplicity with speed, preciseness, and exceptional mastery in the comprehension of Sword Intent. Despite collaborating with one another, Hu Yaoyao and the others were still unable to withstand its might, and they were pulled back into the battle once more.

Seeing the opponent attack Hu Yaoyao and the others relentlessly, leaving them no opportunity to escape at all, Zhang Xuan frowned. “That friend over there, we are all master teachers, so surely we can talk things out. There is no need to resort to a life-and-death duel!”

“You want the duel to stop? Sure, if you think that you can save them, you are free to try. Otherwise, I am afraid none of you will be getting out of here unharmed!” the Chrysalis realm pinnacle cultivator fighting Hu Yaoyao and the others taunted with a smirk.

The opponent's voice sounded extremely young, which drew Zhang Xuan's gaze to his facial features. Astonishingly, he

realized that the opponent seemed to be even younger than Hu Yaoyao and the others, possibly only in his early twenties.

To reach Chrysalis realm pinnacle at such a young age and subdue Hu Yaoyao and the others simultaneously, the opponent's talent was truly fearsome!

Turning his gaze to the Half-Saint realm cultivator as well, Zhang Xuan noticed that the other party was only in his mid-twenties as well.

“Since that is the case, pardon me!”

Seeing that the opponent had no intention of stopping, if the battle were allowed to continue, Hu Yaoyao and the others would eventually suffer severe injuries. Thus, without any hesitation, Zhang Xuan leaped into the battle as well.

“Ethereal Treading realm?”

Sensing Zhang Xuan's cultivation, a disdainful sneer emerged on the lips of the Half-Saint standing by the side, seemingly anticipating that Zhang Xuan would make a fool out of himself.

Even four Chrysalis realm pinnacle cultivators are no match for my companion. What can an Ethereal Treading realm primary stage like you possibly do? You are merely courting death!

“I was thinking, how formidable must you be to talk so much by the side? But it turns out that you are only at the Ethereal Treading realm. Since that's the case, I will have you collapse first!”

The fighting young man also noticed Zhang Xuan's weak cultivation, and the same disdainful sneer surfaced on his face as well. After pushing back Hu Yaoyao and the others with a powerful slash, he rushed straight toward Zhang Xuan with a stab.

Even before the sword arrived, the powerful aura it emanated would have already pierced deep into one's body, leaving one shivering uncontrollably.

That young man might only have been at Chrysalis realm pinnacle, but the might of his sword surpassed even some Half-Saint experts.

It was no wonder Hu Yaoyao and the others couldn't defeat him even in a four-to-one battle.

Facing such a powerful stab, Zhang Xuan didn't bother to hide at all. Activating his Eye of Insight, he swiftly analyzed the area where the sword would land, and abruptly exhaled deeply.

Hu la!

Zhang Xuan's chest immediately deflated along with the exhalation.

In a battle between experts, the slightest millimeter could make the greatest of difference. The sword was aimed right at his chest, but it seemed that the other party had no intention of killing him with this stab, aiming to only achieve a shallow pierce and stop right before his heart. However, with the deep exhalation Zhang Xuan had made, the rampaging force of the advancing sword stopped right before his chest instead.

Even the sharpest sword can't pierce the thinnest cloth once it loses its momentum!

As powerful as the young man's stab was, it had already run out of strength at this point. With a light chuckle, Zhang Xuan lifted his hand and held the other party's sword lightly between his forefinger and middle finger.

Weng!

As if a captured snake, the sharp sword wouldn't budge no matter how the young man tried to pull it away.

What sharp insight and mental fortitude...

The Half-Saint cultivator by the side narrowed his eyes.

This movement might seem simple and lackluster, but it wasn't something that just anyone was capable of pulling off. One's eye of discernment and mental fortitude be on par with each other.

If one's discernment wasn't sufficiently keen and a wrong judgement was made, the sword could end up piercing one's chest instead. On the other hand, if one lacked sufficient mental fortitude, it would be impossible to retain one's composure before a life-and-death situation such as this.

Interesting!

For an Ethereal Treading realm cultivator to dare to face the sword of a Chrysalis realm pinnacle expert head-on, the other party sure had a lot of guts.

However, Wu Xu's sword can't be stopped that easily. He will have to pay a heavy price for it!

His companion might possess a weaker cultivation than him, but his mastery of swordsmanship was astonishing. The other party might have managed to catch his companion's sword out of a stroke of luck previously, but... the true challenge had yet to come.

With his lips curled up, the Half-Saint cultivator turned his sight to the battlefield calmly, expecting to see how his companion would subdue the young lad. However, what he saw instead was his companion exerting all of his strength, such that his face had turned red, but was still unable to pull his sword out of the other party's fingers.

What is going on? the Half-Saint cultivator's eyebrow shot up.

His companion could be said to be invincible among cultivators of the same cultivation realm, but for his sword to be captured by an insignificant fellow who was nearly two realms weaker than him, and be unable to retrieve it from the other party's fingers at that... How could that be possible?

"Y-you..."

While he was shocked, the person who was experiencing the situation personally, Wu Xu, was nearly scared out of his wits.

He had thought that the other party was a small fry who he could defeat in an instant. Yet, the stab that he had put a significant amount of strength into was not only negated by his opponent easily, he even had his sword trapped within the other party's grasp!

“Let go!” Wu Xu roared as he gathered his strength and pulled furiously.

“Here you go!” Zhang Xuan abruptly released his grip.

“Humph!”

As expected of a combat talent, unlike the situation with Ying Qin, Wu Xu immediately did a somersault to neutralize the momentum from his pull, allowing him to recover his balance swiftly. After which, he charged forward and quickly sent another stab toward Zhang Xuan.

Knowing that his opponent wasn't ordinary, Wu Xu's stab was abrupt and much swifter than before. Before his opponent could even process what was happening, the sword would already be right before him.

The Half-Saint nodded in approval upon seeing the stab. “This ‘Blithe Sword’ is well-executed. It seems he has achieved at least twenty percent of my mastery!”

That stab was swift and agile, carrying the aura of a conqueror!

It might be only twenty percent of his mastery, but that was already a fearsome level. Considering how close the two of them were, even of an average Half-Saint intermediate stage cultivator would be unable to dodge the attack!

There was no doubt about it; the Ethereal Treading realm lad's defeat was certain!

“You really want to have a go at it, don't you?”

If Zhang Xuan had been unable to react, he would have surely suffered severe injuries under the assault. Even if he survived the ordeal, he would have had to spend at least the next few months in bed.

He had already gone easy on the other party, but the other party still launched such a vicious attack on him. Displeased, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up as he bent his middle finger and flicked it lightly.

Ding!

With a crisp ring, as if a cracked glass, Wu Xu's sword abruptly broke into numerous pieces and fell to the ground.

When Zhang Xuan had held Wu Xu's sword previously, he had already compiled a book regarding it, so he knew where its weakness was. On top of that, he possessed strength comparable to a Half-Saint pinnacle, making it an easy feat for him to destroy the sword with a simple flick of his finger.

“What?”

Seeing his Spirit pinnacle sword destroyed by a single flick of the other party's finger, Wu Xu nearly fainted from shock.

Even if a Half-Saint pinnacle expert were to exert the full extent of his strength, it would still be nigh impossible to destroy a Spirit pinnacle sword. Yet, for it to shatter with a single flick of the other party's finger... Just how could that be possible?

At the same time, the eyeballs of the Half-Saint watching the battle by the side also nearly popped out of their sockets.

He had thought that Zhang Xuan would surely be severely injured at the very least, but the latter had actually managed to shatter Wu Xu's sword with a simple flick of his finger... How could the other party possibly wield such fearsome strength?

Was the other party really an Ethereal Treading realm cultivator?

They had always prided themselves on being invincible among cultivators of the same cultivation realm, so how could his companion be defeated by someone of a weaker cultivation level than him?

“Damn it!”

Wu Xu shook his head in disbelief, unwilling to believe what had just happened. With a frenzied look on his face, he charged at Zhang Xuan once more.

It was impossible for someone who was nearly two cultivation realms weaker than him to defeat him so easily. Impossible!

On the other hand, seeing that the young man was still unwilling to give up, Zhang Xuan shook his head with a sigh

and raised his fist.

Heaven's Path Fist Art!

Peng!

Before Wu Xu could even process what was going on, he had already been struck by a punch to his chest. He collapsed to the ground, coughing up an endless stream of blood. It felt as if his internal organs had shifted under the incredible force, and even after a brief respite, he was still unable to catch his breath.

“You...”

It took him a few more moments before he managed to recover sufficiently to return to his feet. With a face completely warped by rage, Wu Xu glared at Zhang Xuan, seemingly preparing to make his next move, when the Half-Saint cultivator by the side abruptly intervened. “Enough! Don't you think that you have embarrassed yourself enough?”

“... Yes!”

Wu Xu glared at Zhang Xuan hesitantly for a moment longer before hesitantly backing down to the side. He took out a pill and swallowed it, and only then did he feel his condition alleviate slightly. Even though he had decided not to make a move, his hostile gaze was still fixated on Zhang Xuan, seemingly tempted to tear him apart.

Ignoring the duo, Zhang Xuan whipped out a wine gourd and infused his zhenqi inside before passing it over to Hu Yaoyao and the others to heal their injuries. After that was done, he turned his gaze back to the duo with a deep frown on his face.

“We are all master teachers here, but you willfully made a move on my companions, and not to mention, you even resorted to such vicious moves. Do the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion mean nothing to you?”

“Vicious moves? You haven't seen what truly vicious is yet! Hand over the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, and I can consider letting you off. Otherwise, none of you will be getting out of here unscathed today!” Wu Xu roared in response.

Hearing those words, the short-tempered Xue Zhenyang bellowed furiously, “Scarlet Firefly Fruits? We have been behind you all this while, how in the world could we possibly have obtained the Scarlet Firefly Fruits ahead of you?”

From the start to the end, they had never found an opportunity to approach the cavern. Yet, the duo actually came over to demand the Scarlet Firefly Fruits from them. Was there something wrong with their minds?

Even if you wish to accuse us, at least find something less illogical than that!

“We confirmed earlier that there were Scarlet Firefly Fruits inside the cavern, but they suddenly disappeared when we entered the cavern just a moment ago. On top of that, we noticed traces suggesting that someone had hastened the maturity of the fruits. There are only the few of us in this valley, so who else could it be if not you?” Wu Xu snapped.

The two Sabertooth Spirit Tigers had lost their consciousness, and there were no signs to say that they had devoured the fruits ahead of them. From this, they deduced that someone must have beaten them to the Scarlet Firefly Fruits.

There weren’t too many people in the valley, so the culprit could only be them!

“If we had obtained the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, we would have already long left the valley. Why would we waste our time loitering around this area and talking to you? You are clearly making up nonsense to extort our wealth!” Hu Yaoyao harrumphed.

In her opinion, the duo were the ones who had harvested the fruits, and they were only making use of this opportunity to extort them.

They were truly a disgrace to all master teachers.

“Preposterous, we...” Wu Xu was just about to argue with Hu Yaoyao when the Half-Saint cultivator beside him abruptly waved his hands and bellowed, “Enough!”

Wu Xu immediately fell silent.

“I am sure that we can agree that the Scarlet Firefly Fruits are very important to all of us here. Like you have said, we are all master teachers. If you have harvested the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, we are willing to officially negotiate the distribution of the fruits with you under the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion,” the Half-Saint said calmly.

“How do you intend to negotiate?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Simple. If any of you can withstand three blows from me, we will turn around and leave straightaway. Otherwise... pardon me, but you won't be leaving until you hand over five Scarlet Firefly Fruits today!” the Half-Saint replied.

“If we win, you get to leave without any compensation, and if we lose, we have to hand you five Scarlet Firefly Fruits? Hahaha, this is the most hilarious joke I have heard in the longest time. You call this a negotiation? What makes you think that we will agree to such terms?” Zhang Xuan sneered coldly.

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“Of course, we aren’t expecting to take the Scarlet Firefly Fruits from you for free. If we win, we will buy those fruits from you at a price of 50 high-tier spirit stones!” the Half-Saint cultivator said.

“50 high-tier spirit stones?” Zhang Xuan scoffed. “If you can fork out 5000 high-tier spirit stones, I can sell them to you right now!”

Just the several bottles of Origin Heavy Water and formation plates that Hu Yaoyao and the others had prepared to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits already exceeded 50 high-tier spirit stones. To offer to buy five of them for such a price... Did he really think that they were fools?

If you want to buy some of the fruits, sure, we are willing to sell them. Five thousand high-tier spirit stones, no more, no less!

“You should learn to watch your words. You might possess exceptional talent, but in my eyes, you mean nothing at all! The Master Teacher Pavilion might forbid killing among fellow master teachers, but teaching you a lesson... I think I have sufficient authority to do so!” the Half-Saint said coldly as he glanced at Zhang Xuan with narrowed eyes.

“Why? Are you going to resort to threatening me now that you don’t have enough money?” Zhang Xuan burst into laughter.

“This is not a threat; I am merely stating facts. In the world that we live in, the only thing that truly counts is strength!” The Half-Saint harrumphed as an aura reminiscent of a sharp sword abruptly burst out of him, forcing all flora and fauna in the area to lower themselves subserviently.

Feeling that aura, the faces of Hu Yaoyao and the others paled in astonishment.

They had met plenty of Half-Saints in their time, but the aura of the other party felt like a guillotine above their heads, threatening to decapitate them should they show the slightest resistance. This fearsome aura was something that they had never felt before even from a Nascent Saint expert.

Seemingly unaffected by the other party's overwhelming aura, Zhang Xuan asked with a wry smile on his lips, "In other words, you are saying that justice lies in the hands of the strong?"

"That's right. The Master Teacher Pavilion might have its own set of rules, but before true strength, those rules are meaningless! I recommend you learn your place and hand over the Scarlet Firefly Fruits obediently; perhaps, we might still be able to settle this matter peacefully. Otherwise, I don't mind challenging you all to a Master Teacher Confrontation. By then, not only will you not receive any spirit stones at all, you will have to call someone to carry you back!" the Half-Saint cultivator sneered coldly as he placed his hands behind his back, glancing at Zhang Xuan with an aura of superiority.

Snatching was forbidden among master teachers, but challenging one another to duels was allowed.

Furthermore, considering that they were in a rural area, there would be no eye-witnesses to say anything if the pair did do something to them.

"Fair enough. Since you have already said that much, there is nothing else I can do."

Seeing that the other party was insistent on settling the matter with force, Zhang Xuan shook his head with a sigh and commanded, "Byzantium Lad, get him!"

Hu!

Before anyone could process what was going on, the Byzantium Helios Beast abruptly flew over from further down the valley and appeared before the Half-Saint.

In order to not reveal his possession of the Myriad Anthive Nest, Zhang Xuan had secretly slipped the nest a distance

away before having the Byzantium Helios Beast emerge from it.

“What?”

The Half-Saint cultivator did not expect to see a Saint 2-dan saint beast appear before him abruptly. He immediately leaped in the air to flee, but the next instant, a massive palm smacked him back to the ground.

Peng!

Due to the immense force, the Half-Saint cultivator tumbled eight rounds before knocking heavily into the cliff face, and a large mouthful of blood spewed from his lips.

In the first place, the Byzantium Helios Beast was a saint beast capable of rivaling cultivators who possessed a cultivation beyond it, not to mention, its cultivation was far higher than his at that. He might possess exceptional fighting prowess, but there was no way he could be a match for the other party!

“Damn it!” Knowing that it was impossible for him to flee, the Half-Saint cultivator’s face turned so dark that it could bleed ink.

Flicking his wrist, a sword appeared in his hands, and with a swift motion, he charged forward to strike the Byzantium Helios Beast.

Seeing the other party’s movements, Zhang Xuan nodded in commendation. “Not bad!”

It was no wonder the other party was so arrogant. He did have the strength to back up his words. Just this single move in itself could easily overwhelm an average Nascent Saint!

Even Zhang Xuan didn’t have the confidence to overcome this move head-on.

However... it was a pity that his opponent was the Byzantium Helios Beast!

As one of the elders of the Master Teacher Academy, the Byzantium Helios Beast had fought innumerable battles. How could it possibly be afraid of a mere Half-Saint? With a roar,

its massive palm plucked an enormous tree from the side and flung it toward the Half-Saint cultivator.

Peng!

When the sword was still eight meters away from reaching the Byzantium Helios Beast, the wielder of the sword was already struck on his head, and he was smacked flying toward the cliff face once more.

In the first place, this battle served no purpose at all. There was an insurmountable gap between the two of them, so there could only be one outcome.

“You...”

Pushing himself away from cliff, the Half-Saint cultivator popped a pill into his mouth to alleviate his injuries. Gritting his teeth, he spat, “We are all fellow master teachers; don’t you think that it is underhanded for you to have a saint beast elder interfere in our duel?”

In his view, the Byzantium Helios Beast was probably an elder accompanying them on this trip to ensure their safety.

It should have been a fight among peers, but you had an elder fight in your stead. Don’t you think that it is embarrassing?

“Elder?” Zhang Xuan burst into laughter. “The Byzantium Helios Beast is my tamed beast, why do you think that he is an elder? Surely a beast tamer can use his own tamed beast in a duel, right?”

“Your tamed beast?” The Half-Saint was stunned.

He had seen many beast tamers before, but even the most capable 7-star beast tamer he had seen could only tame a saint beast one realm stronger than him. Yet, this lad, despite being only at the Ethereal Treading realm, actually managed to tame a Spiritual Perception realm saint beast...

How could this be possible?

Ethereal Treading, Chrysalis, Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, Void Pursuit, Spiritual Perception... That was five whole realms!

“That’s right,” Zhang Xuan replied nonchalantly as he beckoned with his hand.

The Byzantium Helios Beast immediately walked over and nudged intimately Zhang Xuan with its head.

“This...” The Half-Saint was rendered speechless.

If he had known that the other party had such a powerful tamed beast, he would have never provoked him!

Beast tamers always fought with their tamed beast. While the other party’s tamed beast might be irrationally powerful, that could only be credited to his astounding capability as a beast tamer. There were no bones anyone could pick from this.

How was this duel supposed to proceed?

Even if he were to grit his teeth and fight on, he would only be furthering his suffering!

“What’s wrong? Didn’t you say that you want to challenge me to a duel? Sure, I accept your challenge. Beast taming is one of my supporting occupations, so my tamed beast can be considered part of my own strength as well. You shouldn’t have any problem with that, right? Feel free to make your three moves, I will also have Byzantium lad make three moves as well, there is no need to stand on ceremony!” Zhang Xuan said as he politely gestured for the other party to make his moves.

Weren’t you arrogant just now, thinking that we are powerless before you?

Two can play that game. If you can withstand three blows from my Byzantium Lad, I will admit defeat willingly!

“I...” The Half-Saint cultivator nearly spurted a mouthful of blood.

If the Saint 2-dan Byzantium Helios Beast were to fight him seriously, he would be destroyed in an instant! Three moves... He wouldn’t even survive the first!

“It’s true that beast tamers can bring their tamed beasts into battle, but since we are master teachers, don’t you think that

you are diverging too much from your origins by relying so much on your tamed beast?”

With a reddened face, the Half-Saint cultivator challenged, “I dare you to have a battle with me without the assistance of your tamed beast. You can use any other means at your disposal, and as long as you can defeat me, we will turn around and leave immediately.”

“I can use any other means at my disposal?” Zhang Xuan asked the Half-Saint cultivator with a peculiar smile on his lips.

“That’s right!” The Half-Saint cultivator nodded vehemently.

As long as the other party didn’t make use of the Byzantium Helios Beast’s strength, given his prowess as a Half-Saint, he could achieve victory easily.

He had gained a rough gauge of the other party’s strength from his battle with Wu Xu earlier, and he was confident that he could defeat the other party in a normal duel.

“Don’t you think that those words sound familiar? I recall that someone said those words just a moment ago... However, if you are willing to compensate me a hundred high-tier spirit stones if you lose, I don’t mind having another duel with you!” Zhang Xuan said.

Naturally, Zhang Xuan wouldn’t accept a duel if he had nothing to gain from it.

“A hundred high-tier spirit stones? Fine! But if you lose, you have to give me five Scarlet Firefly Fruits!” Seeing Zhang Xuan agree to the duel, the Half-Saint cultivator’s eyes lit up in excitement.

Sensing the other party’s excitement even before the duel had started, Zhang Xuan shook his head and said, “I haven’t lost yet, you know...”

“Humph, we will see soon enough!”

The Half-Saint cultivator flicked his sword, and a crisp reverberation sounded from his sword. “Come!”

“Wait a moment. Allow me to confirm once more. As long as Byzantium Lad doesn’t make a move, I can use any other means at my disposal?” Zhang Xuan confirmed once again.

The Half-Saint cultivator nodded. “That’s right!”

“Alright then, sounds fine to me,” Zhang Xuan replied.

“Good!”

With a cold sneer, the Half-Saint cultivator stood upright, and in that moment, it felt as if he had become one with his sword.

Despite the arrogance of the Half-Saint cultivator, his comprehension of swordsmanship wasn’t beneath Zhang Xuan’s at all, achieving Sword Heart realm. Otherwise, his swordsmanship wouldn’t harness might that could destroy even a Nascent Saint expert.

“Zhang shi, be careful!” Hu Yaoyao said worriedly.

Even though the Half-Saint cultivator had been struck twice by Senior Byzantium Helios, due to the latter going easy on him, his injuries weren’t too severe, and they had mostly recovered with the pill he had swallowed earlier. In his current state, he should be able to exert his full strength.

Hu Yaoyao wasn’t too sure how powerful Zhang Xuan was, but the disparity in their cultivation realms was simply too huge. No matter how formidable Zhang Xuan might be, defeating a Half-Saint while at the Ethereal Treading realm seemed to be nigh impossible.

This worry was also shared by Xue Zhenyang and the others.

It was not that they didn’t have faith in Zhang Xuan’s strength, but that his opponent was simply too powerful. Be it the other party’s aura or Sword Intent, those weren’t what ordinary cultivators could withstand.

Seeing everyone’s expressions, Zhang Xuan chuckled leisurely.

“Don’t worry. He said it himself that I can resort to any means as long as Byzantium Lad doesn’t interfere in the duel!”

With a flick of his wrist, he said, “Ding Ding, you’re up. Teach that fellow a lesson!”

Hu!

In the next instant, a massive weapon cauldron appeared before everyone else. It seemed to harness searing flames within it, causing the surroundings to become exceptionally torrid.

“This is... the Guardian Saint Artifact of our academy, the Golden Origin Cauldron?” Recognizing the other party, Hu Yaoyao nearly collapsed to the ground.

It was well-known among the student populace that the Master Teacher Academy had a powerful Guardian Saint Artifact that even Senior Byzantium Helios wasn’t a match for. Even though Hu Yaoyao had never met the Guardian Saint Artifact before, she had seen a painting of it in some books.

She had thought that it was already formidable that Zhang shi had succeeded in taming Senior Byzantium Helios... but he had actually managed to tame the Guardian Saint Artifact as well?

Beside her, Xue Zhenyang and Long Cangyue also saw the world darken before them, and they nearly keeled over.

To tame even the Guardian Saint Artifact...

It was no wonder he was ‘forced’ to become the principal. There were no viable candidates other than him!

Otherwise, if he were to take both Senior Byzantium Helios and the Guardian Saint Artifact away with him, it would be no different from the Master Teacher Academy’s treasury being emptied out...

Hu Yaoyao and the others were only overwhelmed by shock, but at the moment that the Golden Origin Cauldron appeared, the Half-Saint cultivator saw ten thousand divine beasts stampeding through his mind. His mouth widened to the point where one could stuff an egg in, but he was still unable to alleviate the suffocating sensation he felt in his chest.

You tamed a saint beast? Fine, I will accept that. Perhaps, you might just be lucky, encountering an injured saint beast and treating it, thus becoming its benefactor... But to tame a Saint-tier artifact as well, not to mention one as powerful as that cauldron, just how in the world did you do it?

A pity it was that the Half-Saint cultivator wasn't even granted the time to brood over his misery. The Golden Origin Cauldron, upon hearing that there was someone it could beat up, leaped up in excitement and declared, "Don't worry, Master. I will fulfill the mission you have asked of me perfectly. Watch how I, the Golden Origin Cauldron, reduce him to cinders within moments..."

After which, the Half-Saint cultivator saw the large figure before him turn into a blur, and he instinctively raised his sword in defense.

Kacha!

The sword in his hands broke into smithereens, but before he could even process that, his body was already whizzing through the air before crashing right into the cliff face once more, leaving a huge '大'-shaped depression behind him. More than a dozen of his ribs had shattered, and fresh blood spurted uncontrollably from his mouth.

868 Breakthrough, Chrysalis Realm!

“Brother Lu...”

Wu Xu hurriedly rushed forward to pull his companion out of the wall and fed him a recovery pill.

“Y-you...”

After consuming the recovery pill and resting for a moment, the Half-Saint Brother Lu finally regained consciousness. Pointing a shaking finger at Zhang Xuan, he felt as if he was going to burst into tears.

It is one thing for an Ethereal Treading realm lad like you to possess a Spiritual Perception realm saint beast as a tamed beast, but to have a Saint-tier artifact on top of that... Tell me the truth, are you actually Kong Shi's illegitimate son?

Otherwise, how can you have so many good items in your possession?

“What's wrong? You were the one who told me that I can resort to any means at my disposal as long as Byzantium Lad doesn't interfere in the battle. You were the one who set the rules, and I simply followed them!” Zhang Xuan shrugged nonchalantly.

Pu!

A strong feeling of frustration welled up in Brother Lu's chest, and he spurted yet another mouthful of blood.

What was this!

He had thought that the other party could only have a Byzantium Helios Beast as his trump card. As long as he restricted that, he would be able to pummel the other party as he pleased. How could he have known that the other party would have a cauldron on top of that?

Screw this!

The person who I want to fight is you, not your Saint-tier artifact... You might not have broken any rules, but how the hell am I supposed to fight with a Saint-tier artifact?

There is no way I can win, right?

Gritting his teeth, Brother Lu exclaimed, “What I mean is a fight without relying on any artifact or saint beast, a proper duel between two cultivators using their own strength!”

Fearing that the other party would whip out some kind of powerful item next, he emphasized ‘using their own strength’.

“I see. So, you want to have a proper duel as martial artists?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“That’s right. Do you dare accept my challenge?” Brother Lu taunted.

He had always been a proud person, but he had ended up being humiliated more than he had ever been in his life today. If he didn’t vent it out today, it would become a permanent trauma that would hunt him for life.

While it was unbecoming for a Half-Saint expert like him to challenge an Ethereal Treading realm cultivator, in view of the many means the other party possessed, not even he could say that he had absolute confidence in achieving victory.

“Sure, but the stakes will be doubled!” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

A duel? As long as there is sufficient money involved, I am open to negotiations.

“Fine by me!” A glint flashed across Brother Lu’s eyes as he nodded in agreement.

“Remember, you have already lost once, so you owe me a hundred high-tier spirit stones!” Zhang Xuan reminded.

Brother Lu harrumphed. “You don’t need to worry about that; I won’t stoop so low as to renege on my promise! But of course, if you lose, I hope that you can fulfill your end of the bet as well!”

“Alright then. I won’t take advantage of you; I will give you two hours to recuperate from your injuries before we begin the duel, lest you refuse to admit defeat later on!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands casually.

“You...”

It should have been a good thing that the other party was giving him some time to recuperate, but for some reason, Brother Lu felt as if the other party was mocking him, and he felt another warm surge gushing up his throat once more. It took some time before he managed to recover, and after taking a deep breath, he nodded. “Fine!”

It was through countless battles that he had managed to attain his current strength. He knew that it was precisely in crucial periods like this that he shouldn’t allow his emotions to cloud his rationality. Two hours might not be sufficient for him to make a full recovery, but he should be able to exert around 95% of his full strength by then.

And to him, that was more than enough!

Brother Lu turned to Wu Xu and said, “Wu Xu, give me two of your Miniature Restorative Pills!”

“Yes!” Wu Xu nodded.

The Miniature Restorative Pill was an extremely valuable grade-6 pill, and he was usually reluctant to use one even when he was injured. However, knowing that Brother Lu had gotten injured for him, he passed them over without any hesitation.

This grade-6 pill was known to be effective on even the injuries of Saint realm experts. Even if the two pills couldn’t guarantee a complete recovery, they should improve his condition significantly.

Swallowing the Miniature Restorative Pill, Brother Lu immediately felt the medicinal energy coursing through his body, and his pale complexion swiftly regained its color.

The Golden Origin Cauldron turned to Zhang Xuan and advised, “Master, given that this fellow was able to survive my

attack, his strength is extraordinary. It would be best not to make light of him!”

By the side, the Byzantium Helios Beast also nodded in agreement.

The two of them had exchanged blows with Brother Lu, and even though they were able to subdue the other party easily, they could feel that the fellow’s strength far surpassed that of ordinary Half-Saint cultivators.

Even though their master wasn’t a weakling either, he was still some way off from matching the other party.

“I know.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

Through the Eye of Insight and Library of Heaven’s Path, he knew that the other party possessed exceptional prowess, which he couldn’t match in his current state.

However, the outcome of a battle couldn’t be determined by just mere stats. The decisions one chose to make in the midst of a battle played a vital role, too.

Even though Zhang Xuan felt that he wouldn’t lose, he still thought that he should make some preparations just in case. This was also why he had proposed taking a two-hour break before the duel.

The enemy needed time to recuperate, but he needed time to prepare his hand as well.

Zhang Xuan turned to Hu Yaoyao and the others and asked, “Do you have any Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique manuals? I need as many of them as possible!”

The best way for him to stand against that Brother Lu was to raise his cultivation and narrow the gap between them.

Two hours might not be much to anyone else, but to him, as long as he compiled the corresponding Heaven’s Path Divine Art manuals, he would be able to raise his cultivation swiftly!

“We do have some!” Hu Yaoyao nodded, and the four of them began taking out all of the Ethereal Treading realm cultivation technique manuals they had.

As the leaders of their respective factions, they tended to keep quite a handful of cultivation technique manuals of lower cultivation realms in their storage rings so that they could refer to them whenever they were guiding their subordinates in their cultivation. For Ethereal Treading realm, they had around several hundred books each.

Zhang Xuan swiftly scanned them with his gaze, collecting them into his Library of Heaven's Path. By compiling all of them together, he successfully formed the Ethereal Treading realm Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Zhang Xuan turned to them and asked once more, "What about Chrysalis realm cultivation technique manuals?"

"I only have twenty Chrysalis realm cultivation technique manuals with me at the moment!"

"Twelve here. Dong Xin is more meticulous, so she might have more with her."

"I do have a few more, but I only have around forty of them in total."

...

Soon, gathering the four's Chrysalis realm cultivation technique manuals together, there was a total of around a hundred books or so.

After collecting them all into the Library of Heaven's Path and compiling them, the result was just as Zhang Xuan had expected. There were still too many flaws to form a complete Heaven's Path Divine Art.

Nevertheless, the portion regarding the breakthrough to Chrysalis realm was still perfected.

In other words, he had the Heaven's Path Divine Art manuals to cultivate from Ethereal Treading realm primary stage all the way to Chrysalis realm primary stage!

"Guard me, I need to cultivate now!" Zhang Xuan said.

Even though he had failed to compile the complete Chrysalis realm Heaven's Path Divine Art, he was still rather satisfied with the result.

“Yes!” The others nodded, but they couldn’t help but trade perplexed glances with one another.

To cultivate right before the duel... Isn’t that just desperately grasping at straws?

But despite the doubts in their mind, they still made sure to guard him earnestly. They hid him behind them while directing their gazes intently at Wu Xu and Brother Lu, fearing that they might attempt to do something in the meantime.

However, even though the two of them had resorted to some underhanded means out of their desperation to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruits, they still had their pride as martial artists. As such, despite noticing that Zhang Xuan was cultivating, they didn’t try to disrupt him in any way.

Instead, they chose to focus their efforts on recuperating from their injuries so that they would be in their top condition for the duel two hours later.

Seeing that they weren’t going to pull anything, Hu Yaoyao heaved a sigh of relief. However, with her attention freed, doubts about the impending duel began sprouting in her mind. Unnerved, she turned to Senior Byzantium Helios to ask him about the chances of Zhang shi achieving victory, hoping to ease her worries, when she suddenly heard Dong Xin gasping in shock.

“What’s wrong?” The others immediately turned to her with doubtful gazes.

With a body stiffened with shock, Dong Xin pointed behind her. “Look at Zhang shi!”

“Zhang shi?”

Hu Yaoyao and the others turned around to take a look, and what they saw left them dumbstruck.

“Is it just my imagination, or has Zhang shi’s cultivation reached... Ethereal Treading realm intermediate stage?” Xue Zhenyang uttered with quivering lips.

They had gotten a clear glimpse of Zhang Xuan’s cultivation when he made a move against Wu Xu earlier—Ethereal

Treading realm primary stage. Yet, in just a short moment after he started cultivating, why did it feel as if the latter had achieved a... breakthrough?

“It’s not your imagination. He has indeed reached Ethereal Treading realm intermediate stage!” Hu Yaoyao nodded affirmatively. “Most likely, Zhang shi must have been stuck at Ethereal Treading realm primary stage for quite a long while and was already on the verge of a breakthrough!”

Advancing a single stage abruptly wasn’t much to be surprised about. To use an analogy, if one was already standing before the goal of a marathon, all it would take was one final push to successfully achieve the breakthrough.

There was no need to make a fuss over it.

“That does seem to be the case. No wonder Zhang shi agreed to have a duel with the other party so readily; it seems he was already on the verge of a breakthrough. However, it doesn’t seem like advancing a single stage will make much of a difference to the outcome... Ah?” Xue Zhenyang remarked while he nodded, but then he suddenly exclaimed in the midst of his words.

“What is with you again?” Seeing Xue Zhenyang make a big fuss out of everything, Long Cangyue was rendered speechless.

No matter what, they were the cream of the crop in the Master Teacher Academy, competent and knowledgeable. Why did it seem that after meeting Zhang shi, they had all become countryside bumpkins who were ignorant of the world?

“Why do I feel like... Zhang shi has reached Ethereal Treading realm advanced stage? Could my eyes be playing tricks on me?” Xue Zhenyang’s face paled as he rubbed his eyes forcefully.

He was certain that Zhang shi had just reached Ethereal Treading realm intermediate stage a moment ago, so how could he be at the advanced stage right now? Even the greatest genius in the world couldn’t advance that fast!

“Advanced stage? You must be joking! All of us clearly saw it just now, and he is definitely at the intermediate stage...”

Long Cangyue chuckled softly, and just as he was going to make a joke about how Xue Zhenyang’s eyes had been failing him recently, he suddenly caught a glimpse of Zhang Xuan, and his eyes widened in shock. “Holy moly!”

“He... really is at advanced stage!” Long Cangyue exclaimed with tears threatening to spill from his eyes.

On the other hand, watching the frenzied state that the other two were in, Hu Yaoyao and Dong Xin hurriedly turned their gazes over, and their eyes couldn’t help but widen in astonishment as well.

It appeared that Zhang shi was truly at Ethereal Treading realm advanced stage!

Could they have made a mistake earlier?

But was it really possible for all four of them to make such an elementary mistake simultaneously?

However... no matter how they looked at it, the other party was indeed at Ethereal Treading realm advanced stage! There was no mistake about that!

Before the few of them could recover from their shock, Dong Xin suddenly exclaimed with a hoarse voice, “Wait a moment... he isn’t at Ethereal Treading realm advanced stage but... Ethereal Treading realm pinnacle!”

“Pinnacle?”

The group couldn’t help but feel the world spinning around them.

With a tearful expression, Hu Yaoyao gasped, “Why does it seem like he is attempting a breakthrough to Chrysalis realm? No, he is indeed attempting a breakthrough... Wait, that isn’t right, he has already reached Chrysalis realm!”

The group couldn’t help but be dumbstruck once again. The young man behind them was already a Chrysalis realm primary stage expert at this very moment!

To advance from Ethereal Treading realm primary stage to Chrysalis realm primary stage, one entire realm, in less than an hour... Even though they had witnessed the sight with their very own eyes, they still couldn't help but think that they were in a dream.

Feeling so shocked that her mind was going to explode, Hu Yaoyao asked, "Dong Xin, how long did it take you to advance from Ethereal Treading realm primary stage to Chrysalis realm primary stage?"

"Two years and four months... With this record, I was already considered one of the fastest cultivators in the Master Teacher Academy..." Dong Xin replied hoarsely.

When she'd achieved the feat back then, she had felt a huge surge of confidence, which had made her feel as if she was unrivaled in the world...

But looking at the young man before her, she realized that her record didn't even come close to being associated with the word 'fast'...

It felt as if even a turtle would be faster than her!

It was no wonder that, back at the Elder Hall, that fellow had said that his rate of cultivation had slowed due to him being busy with various matters. Back then, she had thought that he was just bragging, but after witnessing this sight, she realized that not only was he not bragging, he was even being incredibly humble...

At this moment, a random, passing thought raced through her mind.

If she were to run to the Ten Great Master Teachers to tell them that Zhang Shi was actually extremely humble and low profile, would they think that she was exaggerating and throw her out?

869 Still a Human?

Having compiled the relevant Heaven's Path Divine Art manual, Zhang Xuan began cultivating with the Earth Vein Spirit Essence without any hesitation.

Due to the easier absorbability of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, his rate of cultivation was much faster than if he had cultivated using a spirit stone instead, so he was able to achieve breakthroughs faster than normal.

However, even though he had managed to achieve breakthroughs swiftly, the amount of spiritual energy he needed had, in fact, increased exponentially instead.

He had procured a huge pool of Earth Vein Spirit Essence from the Cloudmist Ridge, but in just this hour of cultivation, he had already depleted nearly a third of it!

The higher my cultivation is, the harsher the requirement on the spiritual energy I have to absorb. Even though the Earth Vein Spirit Essence is rich in spiritual energy, its purity is still lacking... Zhang Xuan shook his head.

The Earth Vein Spirit Essence was rich in spiritual energy and had a high absorbability, thus making it an invaluable treasure. However, its purity was inferior to high-tier spirit stones. It was sufficient for the usage of saint beasts and other cultivators, but to Zhang Xuan, who cultivated the Heaven's Path Divine Art, it was still lacking.

Only a tenth of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence was suitable for his absorption, and the remaining nine-tenths ended up being wasted in the process.

It seems like I shouldn't cultivate using the Earth Vein Spirit Essence anymore. If it comes to it, I should just sell it for high-tier spirit stones... Zhang Xuan thought.

Since the effectiveness of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence for him was declining, he would only be wasting it if he were to

continue using it. Rather than to waste such a valuable resource, it would be wiser for him to sell it instead.

It might be useless to him, but it was still an invaluable treasure to others. Otherwise, the saint beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge wouldn't have been guarding it so desperately back then.

Forget it, I will think about it when I return to Hongyuan City!

Putting the matter to the back of his mind, Zhang Xuan turned his attention to his newfound strength.

Advancing from Ethereal Treading realm primary stage to Chrysalis realm primary stage, the strength that he could draw from his zhenqi cultivation had increased from 17,000,000 ding to 29,000,000 ding!

With just that, he was already on par with a Chrysalis realm advanced stage cultivator!

(Chrysalis realm primary stage 25,000,000 ding; intermediate stage 28,000,000 ding; advanced stage 31,000,000 ding; pinnacle 34,000,000 ding)

If he were to factor in the 20,000,000 ding from his soul cultivation and 16,000,000 ding from his physical body, that would total up to an incredible might of 65,000,000 ding, which was on par with a Nascent Saint intermediate stage cultivator!

(Nascent Saint primary stage 60,000,000 ding; intermediate stage 65,000,000 ding; advanced stage 70,000,000 ding; pinnacle 75,000,000 ding)

In other words, he wielded strength equivalent to a cultivator two realms stronger than him!

With this, that fellow shouldn't be a match for me anymore! Zhang Xuan chuckled confidently.

That Brother Lu was clearly no pushover, but compared to Zhang Xuan, the other party was still slightly lacking.

Zhang Xuan meditated on the spot to reinforce his cultivation, bringing his aura to its strongest state, before opening his eyes and gazing at the duo opposite to him.

Brother Lu seemed to have mostly healed from his wounds as well, and his aura felt sharper and more pressurizing than before.

Most likely, he had used some kind of formidable secret art to bring himself back to his peak state for the duel.

That fellow sure won't be easy to deal with! Zhang Xuan remarked internally.

Under normal circumstances, given how much weaker he was than the other party, the other party should not view him as much of an opponent. Yet, the other party focused his attention fully on conditioning himself to his peak state, not underestimating him in the least...

It was truly rare to see a cultivator not becoming complacent before an opponent weaker than them. Often, geniuses were defeated not due to being overpowered by the strong but due to carelessness against the weak.

A long moment later, Brother Lu exhaled deeply and abruptly stood up.

"I am done recuperating. Are you done yet?"

His complexion was still slightly pale, but he had managed to condition his state to be significantly stronger than he was before.

"Of course!" Zhang Xuan chuckled as he stood up as well.

"Let's begin then. Draw your weapon!" With a flick of his wrist, Brother Lu took out another sword from his storage ring.

As a sword practitioner, it was normal for him to have more than a single sword in his possession.

"Alright." Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist as well, and a sword appeared in his grasp.

Glacier Rain Sword!

"That is... a Half-Saint weapon?"

As soon as the sword materialized, a huge gust of frigid air swept into the surroundings, as if heralding the arrival of the

king. Brother Lu's lips immediately began twitching.

To think that the fellow's sword would be a Half-Saint artifact as well... Does your family operate a weapons shop?

Otherwise, how could you have so many good items in your possession?

With a reddened face, Brother Lu asked hesitantly, "Ahem. Your sword is a little too sharp, so can you change to another one..."

The weapon in his grasp was only at Spirit pinnacle, which was far weaker than the other party's Half-Saint sword. Just the sharpness of the sword would boost the other party's fighting prowess by at least fifty percent. On the other hand, he would have to avoid a direct clash with the other party's sword as far as he could, which meant that his movements would be severely restricted.

"Change to another one?" Zhang Xuan frowned in irritation.

When I sent Byzantium Lad against you, you said that I shouldn't rely too much on my capabilities as a beast tamer. When I sent the Golden Origin Cauldron against you, you said that I shouldn't rely too much on my Saint-tier artifacts. Now, you are even picking on my sword... At this rate, are you going to start picking on my clothes next?

But as displeased as Zhang Xuan was, he eventually nodded.

"Forget it. Since you were injured previously, I will just acquiesce to your request..."

He scanned his surroundings for a moment before reaching forward to grab a certain object. With a smile, he said, "I will fight with you using this then!"

"A blade of foxtail grass?" Hu Yaoyao and the others staggered weakly.

The object that Zhang Xuan had just picked was indeed a narrow blade of foxtail grass.

He was going to fight with that?

But his opponent was a Half-Saint, and an extraordinarily powerful one at that...

Even if you have achieved a breakthrough, is it really fine for you to do that?

Noticing their worry, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly as he placed the foxtail grass in between his forefinger and middle finger. Pumping a surge of zhenqi into it, the bent foxtail grass immediately became taut, as if a real sword.

“The essence of swordsmanship lies not in the sword; to a true sword master, even a blade of grass or pebble from the side of the street can serve as a sword. This might be foxtail grass, but if used well, it can display astonishing power as well!”

As he said those words, Zhang Xuan gently slit the foxtail grass through the thick tree trunk that the Byzantium Helios Beast had tossed to the ground earlier, and it was immediately sliced into two halves.

“What pure zhenqi...” Brother Lu narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

Even though the other party was wielding a blade of foxtail grass, its true edge lay in his zhenqi. But to be able to make one’s zhenqi as sharp as a sword’s edge... just how pure must his zhenqi be?

At the very least, he knew that he was incapable of doing the same!

“Let’s start!”

Knowing that the other party would still be a formidable opponent even when wielding a blade of foxtail grass as a weapon, Brother Lu let out a battle cry and charged forward, taking the initiative.

Weng!

His sword, imbued with sword qi, sliced through the air with incredible momentum. From the very start, he was already using his full strength. He knew better than to underestimate his opponent due to his lower cultivation or his choice of weapon.

“Come!”

With a light chuckle, Zhang Xuan raised his foxtail grass and stabbed it toward the other party’s armpit like a rapier.

All sword practitioners shared a common weakness. When they swung their swords, the area around the armpit would be open, even if just for the briefest of moments. This was a weakness commonly exploited against sword practitioners. But naturally, most sword experts would have already trained themselves to guard that area perfectly.

And Brother Lu was no exception to the rule.

Huala!

Even though Brother Lu was perplexed as to why the other party would use such a basic move to deal with him, he dared not to make light of the other party’s counterattack. With a powerful flick of his wrist, he pulled his sword back to seal the advancement of the other party’s foxtail grass, and at the same time, he sent a powerful blast of sword qi straight toward Zhang Xuan’s glabella.

In a single move, he managed to defend himself while launching a counterattack simultaneously, successfully turning the tides of the battle in his favor!

“Not bad, your reflexes are good. However... that’s not enough!” Zhang Xuan said with a chuckle.

In the next instant, his foxtail grass abruptly bent like a flexible rope, completely bypassing the other party’s sword.

“What?” Caught off guard by the unexpected twist, Brother Lu’s face paled in shock.

With the bending of the other party’s foxtail grass, not only was his defense rendered ineffective, more importantly, the tip of the foxtail grass was heading straight for a major acupoint on his chest. If he failed to dodge this, he would be severely wounded!

After all, he had witnessed how formidable the might of the other party’s foxtail grass was when the tree trunk was easily split in two with a light flick earlier!

Not daring to take any risks, Brother Lu hurriedly retreated a few steps back.

“Hehe!”

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan seemed to have expected Brother Lu to respond in such a way. He leaped forward, closing the distance between them in an instant. At the same time, the foxtail grass in his hand straightened as it lunged forward, this time directed at Brother Lu’s throat.

Despite the abrupt change in movements, the maneuver was completed extremely smoothly and elegantly, making it peculiarly pleasing to the eye.

While others were appreciating the gracefulness of the movement, Brother Lu felt as if the grim reaper was pulling him down instead. If he were to stop at this instant, his throat would be impaled.

Thus, with a pale face, he continued retreating hurriedly.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan continued to pursue him relentlessly, and this time, his foxtail grass was aimed for the other party’s Shanzhong acupoint, located at the center of the chest.

Helpless, Brother Lu could only continue retreating.

The foxtail grass moved around flexibly in Zhang Xuan’s hands, aiming for the gaps in the Half-Saint cultivator’s swordsmanship precisely with every move. Frightened, Brother Lu didn’t dare retaliate and could only retreat endlessly.

From the start of the battle to this point, the sword had never come into contact with the foxtail grass at all.

“How powerful...”

Hu Yaoyao, Dong Xin, and the others glanced at one another, and they couldn’t help but gulp.

They had gotten a glimpse of Brother Lu’s strength earlier from the aura he exuded, and even an average Nascent Saint wouldn’t be a match for him. But it was only after witnessing Zhang Shi’s prowess that they realized what true power was.

Using a blade of foxtail grass to face a Spirit pinnacle weapon directly, but not only was the foxtail grass not severed, it was even able to force the other party back continuously. Just how deep of an understanding of swordsmanship did one need to possess to do this?

“It seems... that Brother Lu’s defeat is sealed...” Xue Zhenyang muttered with clenched fists.

Before the battle, he had thought that Zhang Xuan still wouldn’t be a match for the other party even with a Half-Saint sword in hand. But with this... he realized that he got it all wrong.

It was Brother Lu who was never a match for Zhang Xuan, and the difference between them was as clear as day!

He couldn’t help but feel thankful that he had acknowledged Zheng Yang as his teacher then, thus becoming Zhang Xuan’s grandstudent. He could hardly imagine what would have happened to him if he had really faced Zhang Xuan.

Too scary!

Peng!

While the others were overwhelmed with shock, Brother Lu continued retreating under Zhang Xuan’s relentless assault, and finally, he found his back pressed against the cliff face, left with nowhere to escape anymore.

Hu!

Zhang Xuan’s foxtail grass also stopped right before the other party’s heart.

“I have lost...”

With a face as pale as a sheet of paper, Brother Lu hated to admit it, but he knew that it was his utter defeat.

“Pardon me.”

With a polite smile, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist, and the foxtail grass finally broke apart into eight pieces, scattering on the floor.

Wu Xu, who had taken the entire battle into sight, muttered with quivering lips, “132 moves, but Brother Lu didn’t even manage to nick the other party! Instead, he retreated a total of 77 steps and was eventually forced to cast aside his sword and admit defeat...

“Is this... still the feat of a human?”

870 Selling the Spirit Essence

As Brother Lu's companion, Wu Xu knew how powerful his swordsmanship was.

Just slightly short of becoming a Hundred Man Commander, Brother Lu's fighting prowess far surpassed that of his peers.

132 moves from such a powerful expert, and yet, not a single one had managed to nick the other party's clothes or even the weapon at that!

Instead, he had been forced back 77 steps before being eventually cornered...

Just how powerful was the other party to be able to accomplish this feat?

In hindsight, it was laughable how confident they had been in their strength to have challenged the other party to a duel; they had simply humiliated themselves!

"Brother Lu..." Wu Xu hurriedly rushed over, only to see the latter's ashen face, seemingly having suffered a heavy shock.

A moment later, Brother Lu sighed in resignation and waved his hands weakly.

"Hand him 300 high-tier spirit stones!"

A hundred high-tier spirit stones had been at stake for the first duel, and the stakes had been doubled for the second. All in all, he owed the other party 300 high-tier spirit stones.

"Yes!" Wu Xu gritted his teeth before wrapping a pile of high-tier spirit stones with his zhenqi and handing them over.

There were three hundred of them, no more, no less.

"I will be accepting them then!" Upon seeing the spirit stones, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up, and he quickly stowed them in his storage ring.

Even though the other party had agreed to the bet, he hadn't really expected the other party to pay him. After all, three

hundred high-tier spirit stones wasn't a small sum. It would be difficult for even a figure of School Head Mo's standing to take out so much money on the spur of the moment.

Yet, the other party had handed him the sum so easily. Could it be that these two are not only strong but are actually... tycoons as well?

If that is the case, I should really start thinking about how I can knock some more spirit stones out of them...

Stroking his lower jaw, Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

Recovering from the shock of his defeat, Brother Lu clasped his fist and bowed. "My name is Lu Cheng, and since I have lost, I shall not disturb you any further. However, I hope to learn of your name in hopes of challenging you once more in the future!"

A loss was a loss; he could only admit it. Not to mention, there was still a Byzantium Helios Beast and a weapon cauldron glaring at him in hostility by the side.

"I am Zhang Xuan."

Zhang Xuan nodded. "You need not think of it that way; it was just a spar between peers. If I am not mistaken, the reason you are so desperate to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruit is for Wu shi over here to make a breakthrough to Half-Saint?"

"Indeed!" Lu Cheng nodded.

The main reason cultivators sought the Scarlet Firefly Fruit was for the increased chances of achieving a breakthrough to Half-Saint. Since Lu Cheng was already a Half-Saint, the only reason for him to go through the effort of challenging them was for his close companion.

"Actually, I have taken a look at Wu shi condition when I was battling him earlier. The reason he was unable to achieve a breakthrough is not due to his lack of cultivation but..."

At this point, Zhang Xuan paused for a moment.

"But?" Wu Xu asked anxiously.

He had been trapped at Chrysalis realm for too long. Most of his fellow peers had already overcome this bottleneck, racing ahead of him, so he couldn't help but be plagued with anxiety.

It wasn't easy for him to learn about the existence of the Scarlet Firefly Fruit in this valley, and he viewed it as his only chance. That was also the reason he had lost his composure and attacked Hu Yaoyao and the others when he realized that someone had gotten to the fruits ahead of him.

If the man before him could help him achieve a breakthrough, it wouldn't matter anymore whether he obtained the Scarlet Firefly Fruit or not.

"I believe that the reason you are unable to push for a breakthrough is due to your lack of zhenqi!" Zhang Xuan said.

"Lack of zhenqi?" Lu Cheng and Wu Xu frowned.

Due to the special training they underwent, as well as the cultivation techniques and battle techniques they cultivated, their quantity and quality of zhenqi were far above those of ordinary master teachers.

Yet, the young man before them had said that Wu Xu suffered from a lack of zhenqi?

Had it not been for the astounding prowess that the other party had shown them, they would have surely thought that he was spouting nonsense.

"Indeed. Your foundation might be far stronger than an ordinary cultivator, but that also means that the bottleneck you face is far more difficult than the others too. To use an analogy, others might require just a pail of zhenqi to achieve a breakthrough, but what you need is an entire lake!" Zhang Xuan said.

"This..."

Wu Xu knew that the other party was right. He possessed extraordinary strength among his peers, but the hurdle he had to face with each breakthrough was higher as well.

This wasn't much trouble in his earlier cultivation, but Half-Saint happened to be an exceptionally difficult hurdle to

overcome.

“This is indeed a common problem that practitioners of our school suffer from!” Lu Cheng sighed deeply. “Zhang shi, is there any way to resolve this problem?”

To possess strength superior to one’s peers, one would have to reinforce one’s cultivation over and over again, making it sturdier and stronger than the others. However, the more reinforced one’s cultivation was, the harder it was to achieve a breakthrough.

This was similar to building a castle. To build a sturdier castle, one would have to build a stronger supporting structure. However, that would also mean that one would have to devote more resources and time for that.

This was the problem Wu Xu was facing at the moment. Due to their strict training, their zhenqi was condensed to be far purer than others’, granting them nigh invincible prowess among their peers. However, the bottlenecks they faced were also more difficult to overcome in comparison.

Zhang Xuan hesitated for a moment before replying. “I do have a solution for that... but it will be quite troublesome!”

“You do?”

Lu Cheng had only asked this question casually, not hoping for a positive answer. However, hearing that Zhang Xuan really had a solution, his eyes immediately lit up, and he quickly shot his companion a meaningful gaze.

Grasping the intention behind Lu Cheng’s gaze, Wu Xu hurriedly suppressed his agitation and clasped his fist. “As long as Zhang shi can help me achieve a breakthrough, I am willing to pay any price!”

For the young man before him to possess such formidable strength at such a young age, he must have come from a powerful background, so he might just know of some means that could help him successfully achieve a breakthrough.

“The solution is actually really simple. Since you are unable to gather sufficient zhenqi to achieve a breakthrough, you can easily make up for that by increasing the rate you absorb

external spiritual energy at to make up for the deficiency,” Zhang Xuan said.

“Increase the rate I absorb external spiritual energy at?” Hearing Zhang Xuan’s solution, Wu Xu shook his head bitterly. “I have used quite a number of high-tier spirit stones to push for my breakthrough, but I have still been unable to build up sufficient momentum to overcome the Half-Saint bottleneck...”

For a person who could whip out three hundred high-tier spirit stones on a whim, Wu Xu was definitely not a person who lacked spirit stones.

Since he couldn’t achieve a breakthrough even with sufficient spirit stones at hand, what else could he do to increase the rate he absorbed spiritual energy at?

“High-tier spirit stones do indeed help to make up for the deficiency, but their effectiveness is limited due to the long duration required to process the spiritual energy contained within them into zhenqi!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

In a sense, high-tier spirit stones were like beef. They were effective in staving off hunger, but it wasn’t easy to digest them.

“You’re right, but what else can I use if not spirit stones?” Wu Xu asked.

“The reason the spiritual energy within spirit stones is harder to process is due to the solid form the spiritual energy is in. If you were to use spirit essence instead, the rate you could absorb spiritual energy at and convert it into zhenqi would be at least three times faster, and that should be sufficient for you to achieve a breakthrough to Half-Saint!” Zhang Xuan said.

If spirit stones were beef, spirit essence was porridge, easily digestible.

Lu Cheng pondered for a moment before frowning. “Spirit essence? Do you mean... Earth Vein Spirit Essence?”

There were many forms of spirit essence, but the one that was most effective for Half-Saints was the Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

The rest would be less effective than high-tier spirit stones.

Zhang Xuan nodded. “That’s right. This spirit essence is formed through the accumulation of the spiritual energy contained in the earth veins. Not only is the spiritual energy pure, it is also easily absorbed and converted into zhenqi... If Wu shi absorbs it, he should be able to gather sufficient zhenqi within a short period of time to overcome his bottleneck!”

“But the Earth Vein Spirit Essence is only found in grounds rich in spiritual energy, and those lands are often occupied by dominant powers, so it is even harder to procure it than Scarlet Firefly Fruits. Where are we supposed to find any?” Wu Xu said with a bitter smile.

Everyone knew that the Earth Vein Spirit Essence was good stuff, but obtaining it was easier said than done.

Even if he knew it could help him achieve a breakthrough, he had to find a way to obtain it first!

“This... Out of a stroke of luck, I managed to obtain a bit of it. However, I was planning to use it to overcome my Half-Saint bottleneck...” Zhang Xuan said hesitantly.

“You have Earth Vein Spirit Essence with you?” Wu Xu’s eyes immediately lit up in excitement. “Can you sell it to me? I am willing to buy it using high-tier spirit stones!”

“This...” A conflicted expression surfaced on Zhang Xuan’s face. “You also know how difficult it is to obtain Earth Vein Spirit Essence, and I don’t have too much of it either. I’m afraid that I can’t sell it to you...”

After a moment of thought, Wu Xu gritted his teeth and said, “Brother Zhang, I am willing to buy it at two times the market price!”

He had to reach Half-Saint as soon as possible or else he would risk being eliminated. This was a rare opportunity, and he couldn’t miss it, no matter the price he had to pay.

“Two times?” Zhang Xuan pondered for a long moment before reluctantly nodding in agreement. “Alright, seeing that you need it so much, as a fellow master teacher, I will make an exception and sell it to you!”

After which, he flicked his wrist and took out a massive gourd containing around seven liters of spirit essence.

“This is all of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence that I have collected thus far; I will give it to you then!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

Wu Xu hurriedly took the gourd and uncapped the cork, and he immediately saw that it was filled to the brim with Earth Vein Spirit Essence. The spiritual energy that gushed out of the opening left his cells feeling energized and refreshed.

“This... Thank you, Zhang shi!”

Seeing that the other party was willing to give all of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence he had gathered to him, Wu Xu immediately clasped his fist in agitation and thanked him. After which, he went to Lu Cheng and pooled some stuff together before stowing them away in a storage ring.

“As we left our place in a hurry, we didn’t bring too many spirit stones with us. We know the high-tier spirit stones we have won’t be enough to make up for the value of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, so we placed some of the valuables we have accumulated over the years in as well. I hope that Zhang shi can accept it,” Wu Xu said as he presented the storage ring over.

Even though they knew that the young man before them probably didn’t lack money, considering that he had a Saint realm tamed beast and artifact, it would still be improper for them to take something from the other party for free, not to mention that they had agreed on paying double the price earlier.

Taking the ring, Zhang Xuan swept through the contents and saw over 200 high-tier spirit stones, a handful of grade-6 pills, and a bunch of valuable medicinal herbs.

If it was in Hongyuan City, this gourd of Earth Vein Spirit Essence would probably only have been worth fifty high-tier spirit stones at most. Yet, the other party had given him so much money in return. It could be said that he had made a huge killing this time around!

It was not that the other party was foolish, but that the value of an item was determined by the person's perceived necessity of it.

Ordinary cultivators could achieve breakthroughs with high-tier spirit stones just fine, so they didn't require the Earth Vein Spirit Essence. As a result, its perceived value would be lower to them.

"Rest well and condition your body to its peak state. With the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, you should be able to push for a breakthrough in a single try!" Zhang Xuan said after putting away the storage ring.

"Yes!" Wu Xu nodded.

He had suffered a punch from Zhang Xuan earlier, and even up to this point, he hadn't fully recovered from it yet. To maximize his chances of reaching Half-Saint, he should only attempt a breakthrough once he was in his peak state.

"Thank you, Zhang shi. The both of us will take our leave now!" Having obtained what they wanted, the duo clasped their fists, turned around, and left. In just a few moments, they had already disappeared from sight.

With the departure of the duo, Hu Yaoyao and the others finally heaved a sigh of relief. "Zhang shi, thank you for saving our lives!"

Before, they had thought that Zhang Xuan was only terrifying in his supporting occupations. However, with this experience, they learned that his talent for his supporting occupations was nothing compared to his fighting prowess!

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“If I am not mistaken, the both of them are combat masters, right?”

Exhaling deeply, the tension left Zhang Xuan’s body, and the exhaustion accumulated over that whole period finally set in.

Even though he seemed to have won the battle against Lu Cheng easily, he’d had to concentrate deeply as he couldn’t afford to make the slightest error. Thus, even though the battle had only lasted for a few minutes, it had sapped Zhang Xuan’s energy dry.

Dong Xin nodded in agreement. “To possess such fighting prowess at such a young age, and considering the different master teacher robes that they have, they should indeed be combat masters.”

She had read a fair number of books, and she knew how fearsome combat masters were. She hadn’t really thought much into it before, but with Zhang Xuan raising the topic, it suddenly dawned on her.

Those two might just really be combat masters!

Otherwise, given that most master teachers cultivated a variety of supporting occupations, rarely would they compete with one another directly in a physical duel.

“Combat masters?” The others also glanced at one another before nodding in agreement.

Indeed. Only the legendary combat masters, who boasted the greatest fighting prowess among the master teachers, could wield such strength!

That would explain why a fellow Chrysalis realm cultivator could subdue the four of them so easily.

“Wait... If Zhang shi can defeat a combat master that easily, doesn’t that mean that he is qualified to become a combat master as well?” Hu Yaoyao exclaimed in astonishment.

“Easily?” Zhang Xuan shook his head with a bitter smile. “He went easy on me, or else it is questionable whether I would have been able to defeat him or not!”

It might seem as if he had won with ease in the eyes of others, but he knew that wasn't the case!

“Went easy on you?” The others were perplexed.

You used a blade of foxtail grass while the other party used a Spirit pinnacle weapon. On top of that, the other party was unable to even land a single blow on you, so how could he have possibly gone easy on you?

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “If I had wielded a Spirit pinnacle weapon just like him, it is hard to tell which of us would have emerged triumphant. That Lu Cheng is a proud person. He didn't want to take advantage of the disparity in our weapons, so he curbed his own swordsmanship. On top of that, I intentionally sliced the tree trunk in two before the battle to create a vivid impression of the prowess of the weapon in his mind... Those were what caused him to retreat continuously. Otherwise, it would have been difficult for me to win against him!”

It might have seemed like an ordinary fight, but before the duel began, the other party had already fallen for Zhang Xuan's mind games.

“I see...”

It was at this instant that realization struck them.

The foxtail grass was an unimpressive weapon, but in a single move, Zhang Xuan had sliced the tree trunk in two, instilling fear into the minds of those who had seen the sight.

Lu Cheng was probably the same as well, which led to his subconscious unwillingness to face the foxtail grass head-on. As a result, he had found himself unable to take back the initiative and turn the tides of the battle, thus eventually resulting in his loss.

“Forget it, it's already over. Here are the Scarlet Firefly Fruits. Condition yourselves well before consuming them. Try to

achieve a breakthrough before we return to the academy!”
Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and passed the fruits over.

“Zhang shi... really managed to obtain the fruits?”

“How could they be in your hands?”

None of them could believe it.

They had been watching the cavern intently the whole time, and they had only seen Lu Cheng and Wu Xu entering it... But if Zhang Xuan had never entered the cavern, how could the Scarlet Firefly Fruits be in his hands?

“I found another entrance behind the valley and sneaked in from there,” Zhang Xuan replied casually.

Naturally, he couldn't talk about his means as a soul oracle. In any case, the items were already in his hands, so the others probably wouldn't be bothered to check on his story either.

“Incredible...”

Nevertheless, the others were still impressed.

To stumble upon another entrance, it had indeed been the correct decision to invite him over!

“Here is some Earth Vein Spirit Essence, I will give a gourd to each of you. After recuperating, try your best to make a breakthrough to Half-Saint!” Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out four gourds of Earth Vein Spirit Essence and passed them over.

These four gourds were significantly smaller than the one given to Wu Xu earlier, but it was still worth quite a sum, considering that it was filled with Earth Vein Spirit Essence. At the very least, it was definitely worth more than the Origin Heavy Water that they had bought earlier.

“This...”

“Thank you, Zhang shi!”

After seeing Zhang Xuan sell a gourd earlier, they knew that the gourd they had just received was at least worth fifty high-tier spirit stones. To give it to them just like that...

How could they ever return the favor?

With reddened eyes, they mustered their determination, knowing that they had to successfully make a breakthrough so as to not let down Zhang Xuan's expectations.

Gugugugu!

With the Byzantium Helios Beast and Golden Origin Cauldron guarding them by the side, they need not worry about anyone disturbing them here. Thus, sitting cross-legged on the ground, they began to cultivate.

Six hours later, once they had managed to reach their peak condition, they devoured a Scarlet Firefly Fruit each.

As expected of the divine medicine that could raise the chances of a breakthrough to Half-Saint, as soon they consumed it, they immediately felt their psyche growing stronger. Hu Yaoyao, under Zhang Xuan's tutelage, was the first one to achieve a breakthrough.

The second person to succeed was Dong Xin.

After the events at the Elder Hall, her mind had grown much more resilient than before. This state of mind would help her achieve greater heights in her cultivation in the future.

Following her was Xue Zhenyang. After listening to Wang Ying and the others' teachings on the basics of cultivation, he had managed to reinforce his cultivation further. Even though he was the third one to achieve a breakthrough, his cultivation was considerably more stable than the other two.

However, the last one, Long Cangyue, wasn't as lucky.

After failing four times consecutively, he felt a sense of fatigue creeping up on him. Knowing that it was impossible for him to succeed that day, he could only sigh in disappointment and stop there.

Initially, there hadn't been much of a difference between the four of them. However, three of them had succeeded in achieving a breakthrough, and he was the only one to have failed. It wasn't too difficult to imagine his current emotions.

The three of them are Zhang shi's apprentice, grandstudent, and great grandstudent, so they have received his guidance. On the other hand, due to my overthinking of matters and my pride, I ended up being the furthest away from him... Long Cangyue shook his head bitterly.

In one way or another, the other three were related to Zhang shi, so they had received his guidance. But he, due to his excessive worries, had chosen to stay out of Zhang shi's way, and the outcome was him eventually lagging behind the others...

If he had known this was the case, regardless of whether he would have become Zhang shi's great great grandstudent or anything else, he would have tried to strike up a connection with the latter somehow.

Seeing through Long Cangyue's thoughts, Zhang Xuan offered a word of advice. "What you are lacking is not strength but confidence! Due to your indecisive character, you are unable to rid yourself of your hesitation and charge forward, which has led to your inability to build up sufficient momentum to achieve a breakthrough to Half-Saint."

If one were to ask whether he had played a part in the successful breakthrough of the other three, the answer would be yes.

The points that he listed in his guidance were often direct and spot-on. If one were to cultivate as he had advised, it would indeed be much easier to achieve a breakthrough.

However, making a breakthrough to Half-Saint wasn't just a problem of strength. One's mind also played a huge part as well.

Hu Yaoyao had a willful and decisive personality, allowing her to make prompt decisions and commit to them. Dong Xin's mind had been tempered to be more resilient after the setback she had suffered back in the Elder Hall. Xue Zhenyang had a straightforward personality, which allowed him to charge forward without any hesitation.

On the other hand, Long Cangyue was an indecisive worrywart, which made it difficult for him to put his mind entirely into something. It was such a personality that made it difficult for him to succeed.

Upon hearing Zhang Xuan's words, Long Cangyue suddenly felt enlightened.

“Zhang shi's teaching is right!”

Gathering his remaining strength, he sat down and began cultivating, embracing the determination to lose his life if he were to fail.

Hong long long!

He drove his zhenqi and rammed it furiously into his spiritual sea.

A long moment later, he finally felt the invisible ceiling that had been limiting him loosening before abruptly falling apart.

Half-Saint, reached!

By the side, the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron gasped in awe. “Incredible!”

Their master might be young, but he had a deep insight into cultivation and the human psyche. His analyses were often spot-on, directed at the very root of a problem.

More importantly... he never discriminated in his guidance. Be it to an ally or a rival, he would offer them his pointers unreservedly. Such magnanimity was rare even among master teachers.

Having reached Half-Saint, Long Cangyue shed the haughty attitude he once had and bowed deeply to Zhang Xuan, thanking him earnestly from the bottom of his heart.

“Thank you, Zhang shi!”

“Alright, let's return!”

Having achieved their goal here, there was no longer any need to remain there. Thus, he stepped onto the back of the Byzantium Helios Beast to return to Hongyuan City.

...

Shortly after Lu Cheng and Wu Xu left the valley, they suddenly halted.

“Brother Lu, why didn’t you use your full strength against Zhang shi earlier?”

Wu Xu had been overwhelmed by the outcome of the battle earlier, but after giving the matter some thought on the way, he couldn’t help but feel that something was amiss.

He knew very well how powerful Brother Lu was, and there were many powerful moves that he hadn’t executed in the duel before he fell in defeat... It was clear that the latter had gone easy on Zhang shi earlier!

“I didn’t use my full strength?” Lu Cheng shook his head, and the next moment, his body abruptly faltered weakly, and he spurted a mouthful of blood.

“Brother Lu!”

Not expecting Brother Lu’s injuries to be so severe, Wu Xu hurriedly helped him to a nearby boulder to rest before feeding him another pill. Seeing the other party’s complexion alleviate, he heaved a sigh of relief before asking, “Brother Lu, this...”

After recovering slightly from his injuries, Brother Lu shook his head and said, “There were indeed many powerful moves that I didn’t execute in the duel, but it isn’t that I was unwilling to use them—I couldn’t use them at all!”

“You couldn’t use them?”

“Un. Even though it might seem as if he was underestimating me by wielding a blade of foxtail grass against me, in truth, every single move he made was aimed perfectly at my opening, leaving me incapable of driving my zhenqi properly to execute my most powerful moves at all!” Brother Lu said with a bitter smile.

The duel might have already ended, but just at the thought of how he had been cornered by the other party’s astounding eye of discernment, he couldn’t help but shudder.

He had tried multiple times to execute his strongest sword art, but he had been stopped by the other party's foxtail grass before he could even gather the momentum for it.

It was just like how a river impeded every now and then couldn't possibly build up the momentum to form a devastating flood.

"You were unable to drive your zhenqi properly?" Wu Xu was taken aback.

"That's right. What's fearsome about Zhang shi isn't just his overwhelming strength that allowed him to challenge even those stronger than him but his terrifyingly discerning eyes. It was as if he had studied every single one of my moves in advance, seeing through their flaws and intercepting them the moment I executed them... In truth, from the very first move, I already knew that I had lost. The remaining hundred moves could only be considered the other party's attempt to spare my dignity!" Brother Lu shook his head.

"How can that be?" Wu Xu could hardly believe what he was hearing.

He knew how powerful his companion was. To lose in a single strike, that was impossible! Furthermore, he had been watching the battle all along, and he didn't notice any hint of Zhang shi going easy on Brother Lu at all.

"You don't believe me? Alright, I will tell you the truth then. In truth, the injury from the Byzantium Helios Beast and the cauldron was more severe than I thought. Even though I had two hours to recuperate, I wasn't able to fully recover from my injuries... You should be well aware of this, too!" Brother Lu explained.

"Un." Wu Xu nodded.

He had been beside Brother Lu while he was recuperating, so he had a clear view of the extent of the latter's injuries.

"Thus, I made use of a secret art to suppress my injuries temporarily for the duel. Coming from the same lineage, you should be well aware of what the secret art is," Brother Lu said.

“Are you referring to the Hu Po Recuperation Art left behind by Elder Hu Po?” Wu Xu asked.

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“Indeed, it’s the Hu Po Recuperation Art!” Lu Cheng nodded. “Do you know its effects?”

“According to what I know, this secret art doesn’t really treat one’s injuries. Instead, it aims to trigger the potential of one’s body, suppressing one’s injuries so as to draw one’s fighting prowess to the peak temporarily. This is an emergency maneuver that we combat masters only use under desperate circumstances on the battlefield,” Wu Xu replied.

Just as Zhang Xuan had guessed, they were combat masters. As the warriors of the Master Teacher Pavilion, it was inevitable that they would have to face deadly battles frequently.

On the battlefield, losing the ability to fight meant that one was just moments away from death.

As such, an elder of the Combat Master Hall, Hu Po, created such a secret art aimed not to heal one’s injuries, but to trigger the potential harnessed within the body to grant one the ability to disregard one’s injuries and continue fighting.

This secret art had managed to save many combat masters from desperate circumstances.

Eager to obtain the Scarlet Firefly Fruit earlier, he had ended up using this secret art as well.

“You’re right. Then, do you know the flaw of this secret art?” Lu Cheng asked.

Wu Xu nodded. “The flaw is... as soon as the effects end, one’s injuries will worsen.”

“That’s right, one’s injuries will worsen, and there is a chance that one’s cultivation might plummet as well...” Lu Cheng said grimly. “Zhang shi seemed to know the condition I was in, so he went easy on me from the very first move, and he

chose to avoid the places where I was injured previously. Otherwise... I wouldn't have survived three moves, let alone a hundred!"

"This..." Wu Xu still found the matter a little inconceivable, thinking that Brother Lu was just overthinking it.

"You don't believe me?" Lu Cheng shook his head. "The Hu Po Recuperation Art suppresses one's injuries by forcing it into a few acupoints. For me, it is the Hongmen and Zhanghui acupoints. If the other party had struck either of these two points, I would have suffered severe backlash from my injuries."

Wu Xu nodded in agreement.

The essence of the secret art lay in manipulating one's zhenqi to seal one's injuries, and the mingmen of these seals would be located on certain acupoints, depending on the cultivator themselves.

"Take a look at this..." With a bitter smile, Lu Cheng pointed to his clothes.

Wu Xu hurriedly took a look, and his eyes immediately narrowed in astonishment.

On the area of the clothes corresponding to where Brother Lu's Hongmen and Zhanghui acupoints were located, there were small holes reminiscent of a thin needle; it would have been hard to notice them if one didn't take a closer look.

"These were... left by him?" Wu Xu's voice quavered in fear as he spoke.

"Indeed. From the very first move, he had already noticed my weakness and swept his foxtail grass at those two points. Back then, I hadn't realized it yet, thinking that he might just not have sufficient power to complete the attack. However, the next moment, in order to avoid hurting me, he forcefully diverted his attack to my Shanzhong acupoint on my chest..."

As Lu Cheng spoke, a hint of deference surfaced in his eyes. "In truth, if it had been a life-and-death duel, he could have killed me in the very first blow. However, he chose to go easy on me. It was just that I wasn't aware of it then..."

“T-this...” Wu Xu’s face paled as it dawned on him what kind of figure he had just crossed earlier.

To be able to go easy on his opponent in such an intense battle, was he still human?

That was way too fearsome!

“Even I can hardly gauge the true prowess of Zhang shi. He is truly like an unfathomable enigma. By no means should we ever make an enemy out of him again,” Lu Cheng said grimly.

“Yes!” Wu Xu nodded.

Since even Brother Lu wasn’t a match for Zhang shi, there was no way he would dare to provoke the other party once more.

“Alright, you should hurry up and recuperate from your wounds; then you can attempt a breakthrough to Half-Saint. Once you succeed, you will be able to follow us to the Four Great Academies to participate in the selection of new members and accomplish that mission. Otherwise, it will be an extremely long time before you get another chance!” Lu Cheng said.

“Don’t worry, Brother Lu. I will surely succeed this time around!” Wu Xu said with great determination.

...

On the journey back, Hu Yaoyao and the others spent most of their time reinforcing their Half-Saint cultivation, and Zhang Xuan also used this time to reinforce his Chrysalis realm cultivation as well.

It was a silent half-day journey back to the Hongyuan City.

From their departure to their return, they had only taken slightly more than a day. When the sun started rising from the horizon once more, Hongyuan City was already in sight.

A moment later, as Zhang Xuan glanced downward, he was completely stunned.

Is that... my manor?

What had been rubble when he last saw it had transformed into an exquisite manor that didn’t pale in comparison even with

the royal palace.

On top of that, he could vaguely feel a handful of grade-6 formations that not only gathered spiritual energy in the area but wielded astounding offensive and defensive capabilities as well.

What has happened? Zhang Xuan was unable to understand what had happened during his absence.

School Head Zhao and the others had said that they would send someone to repair his manor for him, but did they really have to make it so extravagant?

Outsiders might just think that this was the royal palace itself!

“Let’s head down to take a look!”

After bidding Hu Yaoyao and the others farewell, Zhang Xuan had the Byzantium Helios Beast descend to the courtyard of the manor.

As soon as they landed, Sun Qiang immediately rushed up to greet him.

“What happened?” Zhang Xuan asked in bewilderment.

“It’s the Hongyuan royal family! I tried to stop them, but they insisted on fixing the manor. In the end, I could only watch helplessly as they made this,” Sun Qiang said indignantly.

In truth, he was also completely dumbfounded by the happenings as well.

He could still understand it if the Master Teacher Academy had dispatched some men to fix their manor, but for the royal palace to get involved as well, and to go such great lengths at that... Just what were they up to?

“The royal palace?” Zhang Xuan blinked blankly.

He had been kicked out of the royal palace by the emperor himself two nights ago. Why would the other party offer to fix his manor all of the sudden?

“That’s right. Not only so, Emperor Yu Shenqing has also visited three times in your absence, requesting to meet you...” Sun Qiang said.

“He wants to meet me?” Zhang Xuan’s bewilderment deepened.

Were all emperors as unpredictable as that? It was as if they suffered from severe mood swings!

But just as Zhang Xuan was confused by the situation before him, one of the manor servants abruptly rushed in to report that Emperor Yu Shenqing had turned up once again!

“Invite him in.” Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

Even though he had no idea what the other party was up to, it happened that he needed the other party’s Bodhi Saint Tree. This was a good opportunity to ask about it.

“Yes!” Sun Qiang headed out.

A moment later, Zhang Xuan met Emperor Yu Shenqing in the main hall. The latter clasped his fist upon meeting him and greeted, “Zhang shi!”

Zhang Xuan gestured for him to take a seat before asking, “Your Majesty, I am thankful that you sent your men to fix my manor, but may I know the reason behind it?”

“We had some misunderstanding the other night, so I hope that we can reconcile our differences through this,” Yu Shenqing quickly replied.

“Misunderstanding?” Zhang Xuan shook his head. “Don’t worry about it, it’s really nothing much.”

He hadn’t really taken the matter that night to heart.

After all, he was also at fault for destroying the other party’s main hall and ruining the banquet.

Seeing that there wasn’t any hint of unhappiness on the other party’s face, Yu Shenqing heaved a sigh of relief. “I’m glad to see that Zhang shi isn’t angry about it.”

He had been worrying over this matter for the last two days, fearing that he had offended the other party, but it seemed like the other party hadn’t taken the matter to heart.

But that was no wonder as well. A person who could create and gift such a formidable set of cultivation techniques on a

whim was likely to be a magnanimous person, unbothered by such trifling matters in the world.

After chatting for a moment longer, Zhang Xuan raised his request. "I heard that the royal family has a Bodhi Saint Tree. If it isn't too much, may I borrow it for something?"

"Bodhi Saint Tree?" A conflicted expression surfaced on Yu Shenqing's face. "This..."

"It isn't convenient?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

Since he had promised to save Wei Ruyan, he would keep his word. However, if Yu Shenqing were to refuse to lend him the Bodhi Tree, there would be nothing he could do either!

"It isn't that..."

With a shake of his head, Yu Shenqing sighed deeply, "To be honest with Zhang shi, our Bodhi Saint Tree, for some unknown reason, started to wither some time ago. The situation has worsened particularly in the recent two years... I have tried all kinds of means, but I have been unable to reverse its declining condition. I fear that in its current state, it isn't too far from death anymore!"

"Wither?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

"That's right. I have invited over a hundred herbologists over the past two years, but none of them were able to resolve its illness," Yu Shenqing replied despondently.

The condition of the Bodhi Saint Tree was a huge secret of the royal family, so he had been guarding it tightly all along. However, since Zhang shi had asked about it, he could only reply honestly.

"Can you take me over to take a look?" Zhang Xuan asked after a moment of thought.

"Zhang shi wants to take a look?" Yu Shenqing asked in astonishment.

"Indeed. I do know a thing or two about herbology too, so I might just be able to help you on this matter," Zhang Xuan explained.

He had once solved a problem for a herbologist back in the Myriad Kingdom Alliance, so he wasn't unfamiliar with the occupation.

Hearing those words, Yu Shenqing's eyes lit up, and he nearly leaped up in excitement. "Zhang shi is knowledgeable in herbology as well? That's great!"

His ears were already on the verge of growing calluses from hearing about the incredible deeds that Zhang shi had accomplished. After two years of effort, he already didn't harbor much hope for the recovery of the Saint Bodhi Tree. However, if Zhang shi were to make a move, there might still be a chance for it to happen!

Without any hesitation, he immediately brought Zhang shi onboard the saint beast he had arrived on and headed back to the royal palace.

Upon landing in the royal palace, Yu Shenqing led the way, and after twisting and turning about numerous roads, they finally arrived at a residence.

"The Bodhi Saint Tree is right inside..." Yu Shenqing said as he gestured toward the building.

"Here?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had never been to this residence before, but he couldn't help but notice that there were no formations set up in the area. Considering how valuable the Bodhi Saint Tree was, was it really fine to leave it lying around without any protection?

Noticing Zhang Xuan's doubts, Yu Shenqing answered, "The Bodhi Saint Tree is only useful for those who practice soul cultivation techniques, so, perhaps in the whole of Hongyuan Empire, it only has value to our Yu Clan. Others wouldn't benefit from it. Besides, having reached Saint realm, it already possesses its own sentience, and it detests being surrounded by formations, so..."

"I see." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Formidable saint herbs, just like Saint-tier artifacts, possessed sentience. It was harder to absorb spiritual energy from the

surroundings if they were surrounded by formations, so they loathed it.

While speaking, the duo entered the residence, and a few elders within immediately walked over and greeted respectfully, “Your Majesty!”

These elders were all Saint realm experts, and they were probably stationed there to take care of the Bodhi Saint Tree.

“Zhang shi, this is the Bodhi Saint Tree!”

Zhang Xuan turned his gaze over and saw a majestic tree in the middle of the courtyard. It had an extremely thick trunk, and it towered at a height of around a dozen meters tall.

However, the leaves on its branches were shriveled and sparse, and traces of white had surfaced on the tree trunk as well. It didn't seem to be in a good condition.

“Indeed, the Bodhi Saint Tree is nearing death...” Zhang Xuan frowned deeply.

It was spring, the season when everything came to life and vitality permeated the air, but the massive tree was showing clear signs of decline. There was no doubt that it was extremely ill.

Had it not been for the royal family pumping in endless resources to sustain its life, it might have already died.

Unable to determine its condition from a distance away, Zhang Xuan asked, “Can I take a closer look?”

“Of course, feel fr...”

Yu Shenqing nodded, but before he could finish his words, one of the elders stepped forward and said, “Your Majesty, it is not advisable for anyone to approach the Bodhi Saint Tree now!”

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“Elder Zhao, this is Zhang shi. He possesses a deep understanding of herbology, so I invited him to treat the Bodhi Saint Tree as well!” Yu Shenqing quickly introduced.

These elders were herbologists who he had gone to great lengths to invite here. If not for them, the Bodhi Saint Tree might have long died.

“Treat the Bodhi Saint Tree? A young brat like him? Your Majesty, I think you should proceed warily, lest yet another scammer makes things difficult for us once more!” Elder Zhao took a glance at Zhang Xuan and frowned in displeasure.

“Elder Zhao, Zhang shi is different from those before. He is a man of great capability,” Yu Shenqing said awkwardly.

“Different? Your Majesty, you say the same words each time, but the results speak for themselves!”

Elder Zhao flung his sleeves and harrumphed. “If you don’t trust us, we can leave this instant. There is really no need for you to invite outsiders one after another to render our previous efforts futile!”

“Indeed. Your Majesty, if you don’t trust us, we can leave right now!”

The other elders also chirped in agreement, clearly displeased by Zhang Xuan’s arrival.

Yu Shenqing hurriedly tried to appease them. “Of course, I trust you all! Otherwise, I wouldn’t have entrusted the most important Bodhi Saint Tree of our Yu Clan to you.”

Elder Zhao harrumphed. “Your Majesty, if you trust us, we will have to ask you not to invite these kinds of shady figures to interfere with our work. The Bodhi Saint Tree’s condition is already very complicated as it is, and we might not be so lucky as to successfully save it the next time someone you invited over screws it up once more! We will try our best, but whether we succeed or not will depend on fate.”

Over the years, Yu Shenqing had invited many herbologists to take a look at the Bodhi Saint Tree's conditions, and there were plenty of them who had given empty promises, hoping that they could succeed by some stroke of luck and make a name for themselves. However, not only did they fail tragically, they even worsened the Bodhi Saint Tree's state. It was these elders who had to work tirelessly for days in order to stabilize its condition.

This was precisely the reason why they felt extremely frustrated whenever Yu Shenqing tried to bring someone new over.

Such an emotion was exacerbated when Yu Shenqing introduced a young lad who was barely in his early twenties as someone who possessed a deep understanding of herbology... Like hell they would believe that!

Even though herbologist wasn't officially recognized as a Nine Paths occupation, it did have its own heritage. Similar to the physicians, it was an occupation containing deep wisdom within it, and the knowledge one learned had to be corroborated with practice as well.

For a young lad who was barely in his early twenties, even if he had started studying from the day he was born, how much could he possibly have learned?

"This..." Yu Shenqing was conflicted.

If it was in the field of pill forging or smithing, he would harbor no doubts about Zhang Shi's capability. But herbology... he really couldn't say for sure.

Just as Yu Shenqing was still in a dilemma, not sure who he should side with, the young man beside him ignored everyone and walked straight toward the Bodhi Saint Tree.

There was a formation set up around the tree in order to protect it from further harm, but the young man walked past it as if it were non-existent. In just a short moment, he was already standing before the tree; he then raised his hand and placed his palm on its thick trunk.

"What are you doing?"

Not expecting that young lad to disregard them and head straight for the tree, touching it even, Elder Zhao and the others bellowed furiously. They felt as if their authority had been challenged, and they glared at the young lad in hostility.

“I am not doing anything,” Zhang Xuan replied innocently.

After which, he turned to Yu Shenqing and said, “If those fellows want to leave, let them. It’s not like they are doing any good around here...”

The elders immediately lashed out furiously.

“What did you say?!”

“Lad, where are you from? There are just this many herbologist clans in Hongyuan Empire, which one are you from?”

“You sure are haughty for someone your age...”

Yu Shenqing had also brought in plenty of renowned herbologists before, but there were none who had dared disrespect them like that.

After all, they were second to none in the field of herbology in Hongyuan Empire!

It was one thing for that fellow to have disregarded them and overstepped his bounds, but to question their professionalism on top of that...

How dare he!

“What I said is a fact. It’s such a simple illness, but none of you managed to see through it, even saying that it would depend on fate... Are you here to treat the Bodhi Saint Tree or to hasten its death?” Zhang Xuan replied calmly.

He had already noticed some problems when he assessed the tree via the Eye of Insight when he first arrived. However, he wasn’t too sure whether his analysis was right or not, so he decided to step forward and check via the Library of Heaven’s Path as well.

The result was similar to what he had deduced.

The illness was, in truth, not very complicated, but it was extremely difficult to diagnose it accurately by examining just the exterior of the tree.

“You...” Elder Zhao’s eyebrows shot up disdainfully as he uttered coldly, “Simple? So, you are saying that you know what illness the Bodhi Saint Tree is suffering from? Speak then, I sure look forward to hearing what comes out of your mouth!”

“Even if I tell you, will you understand?” Zhang Xuan replied impassively.

Given that these fellows had failed to determine the root of the Bodhi Saint Tree’s illness despite spending so much time analyzing and treating it, it was doubtful whether or not they would believe him even if he were to tell them.

“You...” Elder Zhao and the others felt as if their veins would rupture from sheer rage.

As the top herbologists of Hongyuan Empire, they had always been the ones to look down on others. This was the first time in a long while that someone had dared underestimate them like that.

Will we understand, you ask?

Lad, does your clan know who you have just provoked? Just wait and see, soon, there won’t be a place for you in the circle of herbologists in Hongyuan Empire!

Zhang Xuan turned to Yu Shenqing and urged, “Your Majesty, the Bodhi Saint Tree’s condition is dire, and we can’t afford to delay it any longer. Otherwise, it might just die in the hands of these men...”

“Audacious! You said that the tree will die in our hands? You’d better explain yourself right now, or else I won’t let this matter slide!”

Seeing that the young lad was getting more and more overboard with his words, Elder Zhao stepped forward and glared at the other party menacingly.

A powerful aura burst forth from him, as if saying that he wouldn't hesitate to kill the other party should his words turn out to be nonsense.

As a top-notch herbologist and a Saint realm expert, Elder Zhao had always been respected no matter where he went, and even Emperor Yu Shenqing had to speak to him courteously. Yet, this young lad had actually dared to insult him like that...

This was completely unacceptable!

"The Nine-Nine Soul Consonance Formation, if I am not mistaken, serves to pump spiritual energy into the Bodhi Saint Tree to stimulate its spirit, right?" Zhang Xuan asked calmly.

"You know the Nine-Nine Soul Consonance Formation?" Elder Zhao was slightly taken aback.

Due to the young age and the arrogance of the lad before him, he had already regarded him as one of those incapable fame-seekers. Thus, he hadn't thought that the other party would be able to see through the essence of their treatment so quickly.

The Nine-Nine Soul Consonance Formation was a secret art passed down only among top herbologist clans. It had the ability to stimulate and nurture the spirit within spirit herbs and saint herbs, bringing vitality back to them.

Most herbologists weren't even aware of it.

From their diagnosis, they had determined the cause of the Bodhi Saint Tree's withering to be the dissipation of its spirit. That was why they had spent such a heavy price to set up this expensive formation, hoping to revitalize its spirit and bring it back to life.

But for the young lad to speak in such a manner, could there be a problem with their treatment method?

"Of course! Not only that, you also gathered the spirit of eighteen different saint herbs and tried to forcefully infuse them into the Bodhi Saint Tree, but it ended in failure," Zhang Xuan said confidently.

"This..." Elder Zhao and the other herbologists traded gazes, stumped by the situation before them.

The other party was right. They had thought that they could swiftly revitalize the tree's spirit by infusing the spirits of other saint herbs into it, but the attempt had ended in a failure.

As the result was unsatisfactory, they hadn't reported this matter to Yu Shenqing, so it was only known among them. How did this fellow learn of it?

Did he deduce it with just a glance?

But that was impossible!

Matters regarding spirits and souls had always been an enigma to most of mankind. It might still be possible to deduce that a successful spirit infusion had occurred by looking at the spirit of the medicinal herb, but if it had been a failure, not even top herbologists like them would be able to discern it. How could the young lad before them deduce it accurately?

“This Bodhi Saint Tree has yet to die, and its spirit is still alive and kicking. Yet, you attempted to infuse another spirit into it to take over its body... It is really a blessing of the heavens that it hasn't died in your hands yet! To still be acting so arrogantly around here despite that, do you have not the slightest bit of shame? I really do wonder where you get your boldness and confidence from!” Zhang Xuan flung his sleeves majestically.

“You... Nonsense! We have checked using various means, and the spirit of the Bodhi Saint Tree has definitely disappeared. How could it still be alive?” Elder Zhao's face reddened in agitation.

Naturally, they understood the implications of a soul infusion, so they had checked over and over again to ensure that their diagnosis was correct. If the Bodhi Saint Tree still retained its spirit, how could they not be aware of it?

Another elder stood forward and said, “Indeed! I checked for its spirit using the Golden Needle Spirit Detection Method thrice, and the results were all negative. Furthermore, if its spirit was still around, how could it allow its body to wither like that?”

Yet another elder nodded in agreement. “I also used the exclusive Green Mist Spirit Detection Method of my lineage, and I can testify that the tree has already lost its spirit!”

It was common knowledge that saint herbs possessed spirit. If one were to forcefully infuse a spirit into a saint herb that still retained its spirit, that would be practically no different from murdering the herb!

If they, who prided themselves on their expertise in the field of herbology, had truly unintentionally killed a herb when they were supposed to save it, they would be too ashamed to continue living.

Another elder waved his hands and harrumphed. “The spirit infusion might have failed, but it sprouted new leaves on the withered tree and alleviated the yellowing of the existent leaves. This is a clear sign of the Bodhi Saint Tree making a recovery. There’s really no need for us to listen to the nonsense of an ignorant lad here!”

The others nodded in agreement to his words.

The spirit infusion might have failed, but the fact that it had regained its green glow for even a short moment of time meant that their treatment was effective and they were moving in the correct direction.

“A clear sign that the Bodhi Saint Tree is making a recovery, you say? The leaves might have turned green, but have you checked the roots? Do they show signs of recovering? What about the tree trunk? Does it look healthier, or did the wither worsen?” Zhang Xuan scoffed.

“This...”

The elders immediately fell silent.

They had checked the condition of the tree thoroughly after the spirit infusion, and the condition of the roots and the trunks seemed to have worsened considerably... But there was a period of adjustment, so it should be normal to see such conditions, right?

“The Golden Needle Spirit Detection Method can indeed check for a herb’s spirit, but how long is your golden needle?”

Can it reach the depths of the tree trunk? If the spirit is hidden in the depths, do you think that your detection method will be effective?” Zhang Xuan continued.

“This...”

The elders had no idea how to respond to this either.

The Golden Needle Spirit Detection Method responded only upon direct contact with the spirit. If it had been an ordinary medicinal herb, there wouldn't be any problem.

However, considering the massive size of the Bodhi Saint Tree, there was indeed no guarantee that the needle would reach the spirit.

Zhang Xuan turned to the other elder and stated, “A similar problem applies for the Green Mist Spirit Detection Method as well. It works by triggering a response from a conscious spirit, but what if the spirit of the Bodhi Saint Tree is unconscious? Wouldn't the result you receive wrongly reflect that its spirit is dead?”

“Ahh...” Realization struck the elder, and he fell silent as well.

To the Green Mist Spirit Detection Method, an unconscious spirit was deemed to be no different from a dead spirit.

An elder abruptly interjected, “Enough! After all you have said, you still haven't told us how the Bodhi Saint Tree should be treated? If you can't come up with a solution, you are ultimately still the same as us!”

The others immediately nodded in agreement.

The most important thing at hand was to save the Bodhi Saint Tree; everything else was secondary.

“A solution?” Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly before turning to Yu Shenqing. “Your Majesty, I will have to trouble you to get your men to bring some pails of oil and a paper match over...”

“I am going to burn the tree!” “Paper match (not an official term) is a rolled piece of paper that contains white phosphorus, nitrates, sulfur, and various other ingredients. When unrolled, it will come into contact with the air and light up. It is said to have been created in China in AD577.

874 Burn It 2

“Burn it?”

“You have been invited here to save the tree, not to burn it down!”

“Ridiculous, this is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard! Who doesn’t know how to kill a tree, do we still need you for that?”

...

Everyone was stunned for an instant after hearing Zhang Xuan’s words before bellowing furiously.

There must be something wrong with your head!

You spoke as if we were completely useless, but when asked for a solution, you proposed to burn the tree instead...

The Bodhi Saint Tree was the very foundation of the Yu Clan, and the herbologists had used every means at their disposal to treat it desperately, fearing that their failure would result in their heads being lopped off. That young lad had spoken as if he had some incredible means up his sleeves, but to think that the solution he proposed would be to burn down the tree...

This was utter insanity!

Yu Shenqing’s body shook, and he nearly fainted on the spot as well.

Watching Zhang shi render the elders in the room speechless with his words earlier, he had seen a glimmer of hope for the Bodhi Saint Tree. But after hearing his solution, he realized that the other party was just toying with him!

The Bodhi Saint Tree was already on the verge of death. If it were to be burned down, wouldn’t it lose its life immediately?

Noticing Yu Shenqing’s hesitation, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up. “I won’t force you if you don’t trust me. However, if you wish to save the Bodhi Saint Tree, you’d better make your decision quickly!”

“Save?” Yu Shenqing’s lips twitched.

Are you sure that you are really saving the Bodhi Saint Tree and not murdering it?

“That’s right!” Zhang Xuan nodded before placing his hands behind his back and waiting patiently.

“This...” Seeing the grim look on Zhang shi’s face, it didn’t seem like the other party was joking around.

After a moment of hesitation, Yu Shenqing turned around to the old eunuch, Luo Fu, and instructed, “Do as Zhang shi says!”

Even though he still thought that it was ridiculous to burn down the tree, the fact that Zhang Xuan was the principal of the Master Teacher Academy, along with the various incredible feats he had achieved, still convinced him to trust the other party this once.

More importantly, those elders had been here for two years, but there wasn’t the slightest improvement in the Bodhi Saint Tree’s condition. It would be no exaggeration to say that the tree’s death timer had already started ticking.

Since Zhang shi was so confident in the matter, perhaps it was worth giving his method a try, especially since there was no better solution at hand. If the tree still died eventually, it could only be said to be its fate.

“Your Majesty, I beseech you to reconsider your options!”

“Don’t listen to the lies of this fellow. The Bodhi Saint Tree is already in a very feeble state; it won’t be able to survive being burned!”

Seeing that Yu Shenqing had really instructed his men to bring oil and a paper match over, Elder Zhao and the others immediately panicked, and they rushed forward to advise him otherwise.

“Please calm down. Zhang shi is the pr... a very talented master teacher from the Master Teacher Academy. I believe there is a reason why he made such a decision...”

Yu Shenqing was just about to reveal Zhang Xuan's other identity when he suddenly realized that this matter was supposed to remain a secret until the inauguration ceremony, so he could only quickly change his words.

Seeing that Yu Shenqing was being beguiled by the young lad, Elder Zhao exclaimed in agitation, "I don't deny that master teachers are knowledgeable and discerning, but in the field of herbology, there is no one who can top us in Hongyuan Empire, and none of us here have ever heard of a saint herb being saved by being burned!"

They came from the top herbology clans with long heritages behind them. The wisdom of their predecessors had been passed down from one generation to the next, forming incredible compendiums of knowledge. Yet, despite being the successors of these compendiums of knowledge, none of them had ever heard of a herb being saved through burning.

That was no different from drinking poison to alleviate one's thirst, a concept that completely went against the theories of herbology. It was something that could never happen.

"Indeed! Each occupation has its own experts, and even master teachers can't possibly be knowledgeable about every single occupation in the world. After all, there is only one Kong shi!" another elder added.

Legend had it that on top of being the founder of the Master Teacher Pavilion, Kong shi had been skilled in many occupations as well. In fact, the heritage of many existing occupations had been compiled and organized by him.

The young lad before them might be a formidable master teacher, but even master teachers weren't capable of everything. There were times when they, too, would fail!

"This..."

Hearing the words of the elders, Yu Shenqing's determination began to waver. However, thinking about Zhang Xuan's identity, he eventually still gritted his teeth and said, "Say no more, I have already made up my mind. Let's just do as Zhang shi instructs!"

While they were talking, the palace attendants had already brought pails of oil and a paper match into the room.

Zhang Xuan, upon seeing that Yu Shenqing was willing to put his trust in him at a crucial moment like this, nodded in satisfaction. He instructed the palace attendants to spill the pails of oil all over the tree, and when that was done, he blew on the paper match to light it up.

In no haste to ignite the oil, Zhang Xuan turned to the herbologists in the room and said, “There are countless herbologist clans in the world, and they each have their unique ways of cultivating and treating medicinal herbs. While you all might be considered to be the best herbologists in Hongyuan Empire, do you really believe that you have grasped all possible treatment methods in the world?”

Elder Zhao and the others fell silent.

The pursuit of knowledge is an endless race. Every day, new things were being discovered, and new heritages were being formed. Who would dare say that they had already seen it all?

Not even Kong shi would dare to arrogantly declare so!

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been rendered speechless by the words of two young children while passing through a remote country back then.

“The spirit of the Bodhi Saint Tree is not dead but asleep. You rushed into treating it without checking its condition thoroughly, nearly causing its death... Forget it, just watch and see.” Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan threw the paper match over.

Hu hu!

As soon as the paper match came into contact with the oil, the entire tree immediately burst into flames.

“He really is burning the tree...” The mouths of Elder Zhao and the others twitched uncontrollably.

After spending two years with the Bodhi Saint Tree, they already possessed some feelings for it. Thus, they couldn't

help but feel a stabbing pain in their hearts as they watched the flames gradually devouring the tree.

Yu Shenqing also couldn't help but clench his fists tightly as he watched the flames.

At this point, he really didn't know whether he was right or not to trust Zhang Xuan.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan was staring at the flames intently, seemingly waiting for the right moment.

Shortly after, he raised his hand and said, "Extinguish the flames!"

"Yes!"

A few guards immediately rushed forward and stifled the flames around the Bodhi Saint Tree with their zhenqi.

Even the weakest of them was at the Ethereal Treading realm, and with their strength combined, it took barely more than a moment for them to extinguish the flames.

With the flames gone, everyone got a clear glimpse of the current state of the Bodhi Saint Tree. At this point, its exterior was charred black, and there wasn't the slightest hint of life from it.

Without saying a word, Zhang Xuan walked up to the tree and began striking it at certain locations while circling around it.

After striking it consecutively thirty-six times, he finally came to a halt.

Just as everyone was wondering what Zhang Xuan was up to, the latter returned to Yu Shenqing and the others' side and snapped his finger.

Kacha! Kacha!

The charred exterior of the tree abruptly burst apart.

"T-this... How is this possible?"

The sight that unfolded before their eyes left everyone stupefied.

Beneath the charred exterior of the tree was a tree trunk only about an arm thick, but it was overflowing with vitality, like a young sprout blossoming from the old tree. It was just that it had been hidden beneath its withered exterior previously.

But considering how the exterior was already nearing death, how could the insides of the tree still remain so vibrant?

This sight was mystifying, and there was no one who could comprehend what was going on.

Elder Zhao and the others had diagnosed and treated many herbs in their time, but they had never encountered or even heard of such a scenario before.

Seeing the looks of incomprehension on the faces around him, Zhang Xuan explained calmly, “It isn’t because this Bodhi Saint Tree is nearing death that it is unconscious. Instead, it was out of self-preservation by the spirit to protect its foundation that it chose to conceal itself in the core of the tree. As a result, the external layer was no longer sustained by the spirit, thus resulting in its death-like state.

“You overlooked this and forcefully infused another spirit into it. Through doing that, you nearly destroyed its remaining foundation. If you had really succeeded then, the Bodhi Saint Tree would have already died by now...”

“This...”

The bodies of Elder Zhao and the others shuddered in astonishment.

The other party was right.

Under the condition that the current spirit hadn’t died yet, if a new spirit were to be infused into the body, it would result in a huge fight, and in the worst-case scenario, the two spirits might just end up killing one another.

In other words, it was truly a blessing that they hadn’t succeeded then. Otherwise, they would have been the culprits behind the Bodhi Saint Tree’s death!

“But Zhang shi, the Bodhi Saint Tree has been perfectly fine for many years. Why would it suddenly need to resort to a

self-preservation maneuver?” Yu Shenqing asked, puzzled. The others also turned doubtful gazes to Zhang Xuan as well.

“I am not too sure about that either. Under normal circumstances, a spirit will only do that if it has suffered severe injuries... Try recalling this. In the period of time just before the Bodhi Saint Tree started to wither, did anything happen?” Zhang Xuan said.

The Library of Heaven’s Path had reflected the flaws of the Bodhi Saint Tree, but it didn’t delve into the reason for its condition, so he wasn’t too sure either.

“This... I don’t think that anything major happened in that period of time!” Yu Shenqing frowned. “Two years ago... That should be around the time when the old principal of the Master Teacher Academy went missing. Oh right, the vice head of the Physician School, You Xu, visited once in that period of time to procure a seedling from the tree, saying that he wanted to try cultivating it to help locate the old principal’s soul. Other than that, I don’t think that there are any outsiders who have approached the tree!”

“You Xu?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

That fellow was the culprit behind Wei Changfeng’s death, and in order to let Wei Ruyan exact vengeance for her father personally, he had the other party imprisoned in his own manor for the time being.

Was the other party related to this incident as well?

“That’s right. Vice School Head You Xu is a talented herbologist himself, so I invited him over to take a look at the Bodhi Saint Tree’s condition as well, but he wasn’t able to tell what was wrong with it either,” Yu Shenqing replied.

“I see... Forget it, let’s put that matter aside for now. For the time being, we should find a way to awaken the spirit from its slumber first!” Zhang Xuan said.

It had been two years since the Bodhi Saint Tree was poisoned, so it would be difficult to track down the culprit now. Besides, this had nothing to do with him, so there was no need for him to get involved in the matter.

Understanding this, Yu Shenqing also chose not to talk about it any further.

Stepping forward, Zhang Xuan walked up to the Bodhi Saint Tree once more and placed his palm on it before falling into deep thought.

A moment later, he flicked his wrist and took out a gigantic wine gourd. Uncorking the lid, a concentrated surge of spiritual energy immediately gushed into the surroundings.

“That is... Earth Vein Spirit Essence?” The eyes of Yu Shenqing and the elders lit up.

Earth Vein Spirit Essence contained the energy of the earth, which made it exceptionally nourishing to medicinal herbs. It was an incredible treasure to herbologists.

Pouring the Earth Vein Spirit Essence on the vigorous tree trunk, innumerable buds began growing at a rate visible to the eye on the bald tree, and they gradually sprouted to form lush leaves.

“This... the spirit has been awakened?”

Upon seeing this sight, Yu Shenqing and the other elders couldn't help but tremble in excitement.

For the tree to undergo such rapid growth, it could only mean that the sleeping spirit of the Bodhi Saint Tree had awakened!

However, the Earth Vein Spirit Essence only had the effect of replenishing spiritual energy within saint herbs, it shouldn't have been capable of rousing an unconscious spirit.

Just what kind of mystical means did Zhang shi use? Usually, lighting up the paper match consists of blowing on it as well so as to increase its exposure to air.

875 Problem with the Myriad Anthive Nes

No, something is wrong...

Contrary to the looks of delight on the faces of the crowd, Zhang Xuan had a deep frown etched on his forehead.

What had awakened the spirit wasn't the Earth Vein Spirit Essence but his Heaven's Path zhenqi!

The Heaven's Path zhenqi was so rich in vitality that it could even easily neutralize lethal poison, so naturally, it had the ability to rouse the unconscious spirit within the Bodhi Saint Tree as well.

However, what had left a deep frown on his face was the realization that the spirit of the Bodhi Saint Tree had been unconscious not just because it was injured but because it was poisoned!

The Heaven's Path zhenqi was incredibly pure, allowing it to travel through the tree unobstructed. As such, he was able to catch a clear glimpse of the state of the Bodhi Saint Tree's unconscious spirit.

The spirit was indeed injured, but it wasn't severe enough to drive it into an unconscious state.

What had truly sapped the spirit was a fight against a lethal poison that was ongoing even now.

And most importantly of all, he actually recognized that lethal poison...

It's the Soul Purging Poison! A peculiar glint flashed across Zhang Xuan's eyes.

Speaking of the Soul Purging Poison, most, including the school heads of the Master Teacher Academy, might be unfamiliar with the name. However, if one were to define it as the lethal poison concocted using the 'Green-leafed Heart

Nexus Plant' and the 'Soulless Flower', most should understand what it was in an instant.

It was the lethal poison You Xu had given him during the Life-and-Death Physician Duel!

This poison, once consumed, would immediately corrode one's heart and mind, resulting in a swift death. Not even Saint realm experts would be spared from this tragic outcome.

Even though the Bodhi Saint Tree was a saint herb rich in vitality, it was still difficult for it to stand its ground against the potent Soul Purging Poison. The only reason it was able to survive so long was because Elder Zhao and the others, even though their direction was wrong from the very start, had fed it many nourishing substances, granting it the strength to withstand the onslaught of the poison.

You Xu came here two years ago, and shortly afterward, the Bodhi Saint Tree fell ill... Could You Xu have really been the culprit? Zhang Xuan frowned.

The Soul Purging Poison was extremely hard to concoct, not to mention, the Green-leafed Heart Nexus Plant and the Soulless Flower had gone extinct centuries ago. On top of that, You Xu had an opportunity to strike as well... Following this line of deduction, all of the current evidence seemed to point toward You Xu.

But... if Yu Shenqing was willing to allow You Xu to get close to the Bodhi Saint Tree to procure its seedling, that could mean that there was no conflict between them.

So... what could You Xu stand to gain from poisoning the Bodhi Saint Tree?

Zhang Xuan contemplated over the issue a moment longer, but he was still unable to connect the dots. Shaking his head, he decided to turn his attention away from the matter. Forget it, this should be a matter for Yu Shenqing to worry about...

The only reason he had treated the Bodhi Saint Tree was to borrow it to save Wei Ruyan. As for uncovering the culprit who had poisoned it, that was a job for the others to do.

After emptying out the Earth Vein Spirit Essence in the gourd and pumping a few dozen more surges of zhenqi in, the weak Bodhi Saint Tree began to regain its vitality, and signs of its former glory started to appear.

Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan said, “Alright, I’m done.”

“Thank you, Zhang shi!” The agitated Yu Shenqing immediately rushed forward and clasped his fist in gratitude.

The Bodhi Saint Tree was the foundation of their Yu Clan. Once it was gone, the Yu Clan would start falling into decline, eventually disappearing in the annals of history.

Yu Shenqing had thought that it was hopeless, and he had already prepared himself for the worst. He really hadn’t expected the young man before him to be able to easily identify the cause and resolve the problem within less than half a day.

“Zhang shi...”

The faces of Elder Zhao and the others reddened in embarrassment, and if they could, they would have loved to vanish on the spot.

They had doubted the other party, accusing him of only being there for the fame. Yet, they—the ‘knowledgeable’ ones—had spent two years achieving nothing, but he—the ‘ignorant’ one—had solved the problem surrounding the Bodhi Saint Tree in just a few hours.

Just recalling the matter was sufficient to fill them with embarrassment.

An elder stepped forward and said, “Zhang shi, if you are free, do come over and conduct a lecture for us. Our Sun Clan is willing to compensate you with a hundred Spirit pinnacle medicinal herbs in return!”

It was a problem that they couldn’t figure out despite coming together, but the other party was able to find a solution for it with a single glance. His mastery in herbology was far beyond their imagination.

If they could invite him to their clan to lecture them, the proficiency of their clan members would surely rise rapidly, and it would just be a matter of time before they surpassed the other herbology clans.

Another elder stepped forward and offered, “Zhang shi, come to our Chen Clan! We are willing to offer you 150 Spirit pinnacle medicinal herbs and five saint herbs!”

Knowing that Zhang shi could possibly herald in an era of prosperity for their clan, the other elders in the room could no longer hold themselves back either.

“Zhang shi, come to our Zhao Clan instead...”

“Our Liu Clan...”

...

“Thank you for your high evaluation for me, but I don’t have the intention of conducting any lectures for the time being!”

Seeing the previously haughty elders standing before him politely as if young junior school students before a teacher, Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

In truth, the offers the elders had made were extremely tempting, but the problem was that he had no idea how to lecture them on herbology!

The reason he was able to cure the Bodhi Saint Tree was due to his Eye of Insight and Library of Heaven’s Path. It had very little to do with his knowledge concerning herbology.

If he were to really conduct lectures for them, it wouldn’t be long before they started pestering him for refunds.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan was unwilling to conduct any lectures, Elder Zhao and the others could only back down in disappointment.

Zhang Xuan turned to the crowd and said, “Your Majesty and elders, I need to borrow the Bodhi Saint Tree to resolve some private affairs, so...”

Understanding the meaning behind Zhang Xuan’s words, Yu Shenqing turned to the crowd and smiled. “You have all

worked hard to treat the Bodhi Saint Tree over the last two years. I will have the royal chefs prepare a feast this instant, so please follow me to the main hall!”

“Your Majesty, thank you!”

“We haven’t really done anything much...”

The other elders nodded as they followed Yu Shenqing out.

Soon, Zhang Xuan was the only one left in the residence.

He flew to the air to take a look at the surroundings and saw that Yu Shenqing had deployed the guards in the area away as well, strictly prohibiting anyone from coming close to the residence. Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan took out the sickly Wei Ruyan from the Myriad Anthive Nest.

In recent days, he had been bringing her around in case her condition abruptly worsened and emergency treatment was required.

With a healthy Bodhi Saint Tree before him now, it was time to treat her affliction once and for all!

Zhang Xuan first drew his soul out of his body before summoning Wei Ruyan’s soul out as well, and using a secret art, he infused the latter’s soul into the Bodhi Saint Tree.

He had taken a close look earlier, and the Bodhi Saint Tree was indeed extremely effective in nurturing souls.

Zhang Xuan followed Wei Ruyan’s soul into the Bodhi Saint Tree to assess her condition, and he could sense the latter’s feeble soul being nurtured, growing stronger by the moment.

Hmm? She is recovering faster than I thought... Zhang Xuan fell in a moment of thought before the answer struck him.

It is the Soul Purge Poison! To think that the two years of pain the Bodhi Saint Tree suffered under the tyranny of the Soul Purge Poison would become an opportunity for Wei Ruyan instead!

Despite the massive size and greater medicinal potency of the Bodhi Saint Tree, it was just a matter of time before Wei

Ruyan's Poison Soul Constitution poisoned it and rendered its effects negligible just like with the Ten-leafed Flower.

However, after two years of fending against the Soul Purge Poison, this Bodhi Saint Tree had already gained a fair degree of immunity to poison. On top of that, the Poison Soul Constitution had the ability to consume lethal poison, and the lingering Soul Purge Poison left in the tree was greatly nourishing to her!

In other words, not only would Wei Ruyan's soul not poison the Bodhi Saint Tree in the short term, it would even help to devour the remaining poison left within it.

At the same time, Wei Ruyan's soul would recover faster as well.

At this rate, it will only take a day for her to regain consciousness... Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

It seemed like it was the correct decision for him to choose to save the Bodhi Saint Tree.

Even though he had used up a fair bit of precious Earth Vein Spirit Essence in the midst of doing so, it would be well worth the cost if he could successfully cure Wei Changfeng's daughter of her affliction with this.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan returned his soul to his body, and he stowed Wei Ruyan's body back into the Myriad Anthive Nest as well.

Shortly after he did so, a voice suddenly sounded in his mind. "Master, I need you to come in here urgently..."

Hearing that voice, Zhang Xuan frowned.

It was the Myriad Anthive Queen.

A while ago, it had devoured Kong shi's folded space, and it was currently using it to expand its nest. According to its deductions, it would require at least three months to finish the job. Given that less than five days had passed, it must have met with some kind of issue.

Thus, Zhang Xuan quickly entered the Myriad Anthive Nest without any hesitation.

The Myriad Anthive Nest was considerably larger than before, stretching twenty meters from one end to the other. Even with the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron standing within, there was still plenty of space to move around.

While admiring the incredible ability of the Myriad Anthive Queen, Zhang Xuan walked up to it and asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Master... I think I might have underestimated the difficulty of this task. I know that I said that I would be able to succeed in three months, but due to my cultivation being too low... I am already starting to lose control over this space!” the Myriad Anthive Queen explained awkwardly.

It had previously declared confidently that it would be able to assimilate Kong Shi’s folded space into the Myriad Anthive Nest within three months, but from the looks of it now, it wouldn’t happen that easily.

With the Myriad Anthive Queen’s current cultivation of Perfect Harmonization realm, it was still within its means to control a space of around ten meters wide. However, when the nest was increased to twenty meters wide, the space became a little too large for it to control properly.

At the current rate, the space might just very well collapse even before the nest could be fully constructed.

“Lose control?” Zhang Xuan said with a grim expression.

Even though the unique constitution of the Myriad Anthive Queen allowed it to utilize spatial manipulation despite only being at the Perfect Harmonization realm, its abilities were still limited by its cultivation. If it were to forcefully expand its nest, it could very well suffer a backlash, and huge trouble would ensue.

“Is there any way to solve the problem?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“There is, but... it will be rather troublesome!” The Myriad Anthive Queen shook her head.

“Speak.” Hearing that there was a solution, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief.

“The problem can be solved by raising my cultivation swiftly. As long as I reach Saint realm, I should be able to retain perfect control of the space and even hasten the assimilation process at that,” the Myriad Anthive Queen said.

“Raising your cultivation? That’s easy, I can easily do that. However, to reach Saint realm...” Zhang Xuan frowned. “Forget it, I will do what I can first.”

If raising the Myriad Anthive Queen’s cultivation was all it took, it wasn’t really a huge issue. With Zhang Xuan’s Heaven’s Path zhenqi, he could cleanse the bloodline of a spirit beast and raise its cultivation.

Kacha! Kacha!

Under the nourishment of Zhang Xuan’s zhenqi, the Myriad Anthive Queen’s body jolted, and its cultivation began rising steadily.

Six hours later, under the nourishment of the Heaven’s Path zhenqi and Earth Vein Spirit Essence, the Myriad Anthive Queen’s cultivation reached Chrysalis realm primary stage, just like Zhang Xuan’s.

Due to the limits of Zhang Xuan’s cultivation, he could only raise its cultivation this far.

Even though Perfect Harmonization realm pinnacle to Chrysalis realm primary stage was a rise in cultivation by slightly more than a realm, the Myriad Anthive Queen was still a significant way off from reaching Saint realm.

After reinforcing its cultivation, the Myriad Anthive Queen contemplated for a moment before speaking.

“Master, I heard that the Beast Hall has a bottle of the blood essence of a Saint realm Myriad Anthive Queen in its inventory. If I can obtain it, I should be able to raise my cultivation to Saint realm swiftly...”

876 Master Teacher!

“Beast Hall?” Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

“Un. The Beast Hall keeps an inventory of the blood essence of many saint beasts, and as long as beast tamers have reached a certain rank and are able to afford the price, they are able to trade for these blood essences!” the Myriad Anthive Queen said.

“I see... I will take the 6-star beast tamer examination now and trade for some then.”

Knowing that the blood essence of a Saint realm Myriad Anthive Queen had such an effect, Zhang Xuan swiftly left the nest. He took another look at Wei Ruyan to check on her condition once more, and after confirming that she was recovering rapidly and that the Bodhi Saint Tree showed no signs of being poisoned, he heaved a sigh of relief and left the royal palace.

His next destination was the Master Teacher Academy.

To take the beast tamer examination and trade for the blood essence, it would be more convenient to do it via School Head Mo. Besides, he wasn't too sure where Hongyuan Empire's Beast Hall was located.

Entering the Beast Tamer School, he quickly found School Head Mo sitting with a deep frown in his office, seemingly troubled by something.

“Principal Zhang!” Upon noticing Zhang Xuan's presence, School Head Mo quickly got up and clasped his fist politely.

“There's no need to stand on ceremony. The reason I came over here today is to take the 6-star beast tamer examination...” Zhang Xuan immediately revealed the reason behind his arrival.

“6-star beast tamer examination?” School Head Mo was visibly stunned for a moment before he shook his head.

“Principal Zhang, you are pulling my leg. Since you were able

to tame even Senior Byzantium Helios, you are qualified to be a 7-star beast tamer. I have already helped you apply for it from the headquarters, and I have received a positive reply as well. I am just waiting for the emblem to arrive now.”

The Byzantium Helios Beast was already at Saint 2-dan Spiritual Perception realm, and under the classification of the Beast Tamer Hall, one who could tame a saint beast of such power was qualified as a 7-star beast tamer. Thus, there was no need for him to go through the effort of taking the examination.

“7-star beast tamer?” Zhang Xuan was surprised.

He had been intending to take the 6-star examination, only to learn that School Head Mo had already applied for a 7-star emblem on his behalf.

This worked fine with him, too; he would be spared from quite a bit of trouble with this.

“I will be thanking you in advance then. Since the headquarters have already agreed to it, it just so happens that there is something I need to request from them... I would like to trade for some Saint realm Myriad Anthive Queen’s blood essence!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Saint realm Myriad Anthive Queen’s blood essence?” School Head Mo frowned.

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

School Head Mo replied, after a moment of hesitation, “Usually, the headquarters will approve the trade for most saint beast’s blood essence, and the price won’t be too high as well. But the Myriad Anthive Queen’s blood essence... I fear that it won’t be that easy to make the trade.”

“Won’t be easy to make the trade?” Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

Since they were all from saint beasts, the difficulty in procuring their blood essence shouldn’t be too different from one another. Why would the Myriad Anthive Queen be an exception?

Noticing Zhang Xuan's doubts, School Head Mo explained, "In the very first place, the Myriad Anthive Queen is an extremely rare beast, and on top of that, only a small proportion of them manage to achieve a breakthrough to Saint realm!

"More importantly, the Myriad Anthive Queen possesses the ability to create space, making it an extremely valuable beast... Even if the headquarters do have its blood essence, I fear that the price to obtain it will be exorbitant!"

"Exorbitant? Roughly how much will it cost?"

"Even taking into account your identity as a 7-star beast tamer, it will still cost around several thousand high-tier spirit stones, or even more," School Head Mo said as he shook his head bitterly.

The price to purchase the blood essence of a Saint realm Myriad Anthive Queen was simply too great for them to bear.

"Several thousand high-tier spirit stones?" Zhang Xuan's lips twitched.

He had thought that he could finally be considered wealthy after receiving several hundred high-tier spirit stones from Wu Xu and Lu Cheng, but to think that it wouldn't even be sufficient to buy a single item.

Furthermore, this was due to the fact that he was a 7-star beast tamer. If it was an outsider instead, the price could very well be hiked up by twofold.

The occupation guilds like the Beast Tamer Hall would often grant special privileges such as discounts or priority in services to its own members, depending on their rank.

It seemed like what he had wasn't much after all.

At this point, School Head Mo suddenly spoke up. "Actually, there is a way to obtain it even if one can't afford the price, but... it will be much harder!"

"Oh?" Seeing that there was a way to work around it, Zhang Xuan quickly turned his gaze to the other party.

“As long as your contribution to the Beast Tamer Hall is high enough, the headquarters could give it to you for free,” School Head Mo said.

“Contribution?” Zhang Xuan frowned at the unfamiliar term.

“That’s right. Donating the blood essence of rare spirit beasts or saint beasts, or accomplishing the missions set by the Beast Hall... all of these will be noted by the Beast Hall as contributions from the individual members,” School Head Mo explained.

“Donating the blood essence of rare spirit beasts or saint beasts?” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

It had been innumerable years since the Beast Hall was established, and it possessed influence all around the Master Teacher Continent. There were only a handful spirit beasts and saint beasts that it couldn’t get to, so very few of them could be considered rare. Even if Zhang Xuan knew where he could find one, he wouldn’t have the time to look for it.

“The first way is indeed rather difficult, most only accomplish it with a stroke of luck. As for the second, the Beast Hall rarely set missions, and even when they do, it wouldn’t reach here...” School Head Mo said with a bitter smile.

Contribution to a guild wasn’t that easily earned. Otherwise, its treasury would have been depleted long ago.

“School Head Mo, we aren’t able to hold on any longer! We need assistance...”

In that moment, flurried footsteps sounded, and an elder abruptly barged into the room.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, the elder clasped his fist and greeted, “Principal Zhang!”

It was the head of the Blacksmith School, Zhao Bingxu.

“School Head Zhao, what do you mean by being unable to hold on any longer?” Zhang Xuan asked in bewilderment.

At this point, he couldn’t help but recall the deep frown he had seen on School Head Mo’s face when he first entered. He had thought that it might have been some personal problem, but

after hearing Zhao Bingxu's words, things probably weren't as simple as they seemed.

"It's actually nothing much. Principal Zhang, we are just a day away from your inauguration ceremony, so you should focus on preparing for it for the time being. You don't have to worry about anything else," Zhao Bingxu quickly replied with a smile.

"Indeed. Principal Zhang, leave the other matters to us," School Head Mo quickly added in agreement.

Noticing that something was amiss, Zhang Xuan frowned. "Tell me, what is it?"

The two elders before him were the heads of the Beast Tamer School and Blacksmith School, as well as Saint 1-dan pinnacle experts. For such powerful figures to have troubled looks on their faces, something major must have happened.

While Zhang Xuan might not have paid much heed to the matters concerning the Master Teacher Academy, he was still ultimately the principal, and he had to bear the responsibilities that came with that role.

"This..."

Hearing Zhang Xuan ask about the matter, the two school heads glance at one another hesitantly, unsure of what they should do.

But seeing the determination in Zhang Xuan's eyes, School Head Mo knew that they wouldn't be able to hide it from him any further, so he sighed deeply and said, "The beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge have launched a beast stampede against us."

"Cloudmist Ridge? Beast stampede?" Zhang Xuan was taken aback.

"Un. The beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge have always lived isolated from our Hongyuan Empire, never interfering with the business of the other. However, just a few days ago, they suddenly went on a rampage, hunting down all of the hunters and cultivators roaming the mountains," School Head Mo said.

“Our Master Teacher Academy received a request for assistance, so we sent our men in to warn them against their actions. But instead of backing down, they assaulted our master teachers and even sent their full forces forward, initiating a beast stampede against Hongyuan City. Left with no choice, I sent in all of the students of the Beast Tamer School to fend off their forces at Hongyuan Mountain Range... It has been a day since the battle began, and our line of defense is starting to crumble!”

“Crumble...” Zhang Xuan’s face darkened, and he clenched his fists tightly. “Take me there, I want to take a look!”

The reason the beasts of Cloudmist Ridge went on a rampage was probably related to him taking away their Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

Even though the beasts of Cloudmist Ridge had lived separately from Hongyuan Empire, there had always been some tension between them. Nevertheless, an uneasy peace was established between the two due to the deterrence of the Master Teacher Academy.

Part of the reason Zhang Xuan didn’t hesitate to take away the Earth Vein Spirit Essence despite knowing how much the beasts of Cloudmist Ridge valued it was because he knew that if the other party continued to accrue more power, this could spell disaster for Hongyuan Empire in the long run.

Even so, he hadn’t expected the other party to actually charge out and go head-to-head with the Master Teacher Academy.

Since this matter had started due to him, he couldn’t back out at this point.

“Principal Zhang, you can’t go! You haven’t undergone the inauguration ceremony yet, and your cultivation is still too low. If the others learn of your identity, they will target you!” Zhao Bingxu shook his head firmly.

It was not without reason that they had chosen not to inform the principal of a matter as major as the students being dispatched to battle. At the current moment, Zhang Xuan was simply too weak. If the others were to learn that he was the

principal, the beasts of Cloudmist Ridge would surely focus their forces on him.

Should the principal be captured by the enemy at such a crucial period, it would be a devastating blow to the morale of their forces, bringing forth panic and chaos.

Furthermore, they earnestly believed that with Zhang Xuan's capability, the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy could be brought to greater heights. At least, until the latter's capabilities matured, they, as elders, must not let any harm come to him.

Thus, they had chosen to take matters into their own hands instead.

“Take me there, or else I will just have to head there myself!” Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

The lives of innumerable students were at stake; he couldn't possibly sit idly at such a crucial moment!

“This...” Seeing the determination in Zhang Xuan's eyes, the two school heads glanced at one another and sighed. “Alright, we will take you over there. However, I hope that you won't be hasty, and by no means should you reveal your identity to anyone. This isn't the first beast stampede from Cloudmist Ridge, so we will surely find a way to suppress it in the end.”

“Un.” Zhang Xuan nodded.

School Head Mo summoned his Inferno Dragon Saint Beast over, and the three of them swiftly got on and flew for Hongyuan Mountain Range.

Standing on the back of the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast, Zhang Xuan asked Zhao Bingxu, “What is the current situation?”

“It isn't looking too optimistic... The beast stampede is much more severe than the previous cases. In the first place, most spirit beasts possess the strength to rival cultivators stronger than themselves. To make things worse, the spirit beasts are coordinating with one another like disciplined soldiers, and this places our students in a very dangerous position!” Zhao Bingxu said hesitantly.

“Coordinating with one another like disciplined soldiers?”

Zhao Bingxu nodded. “Un. If I am not mistaken, the saint beasts of Cloudmist Ridge have probably gotten involved as well. Only under their leadership can the spirit beasts display such battle prowess collectively.”

“How are the casualties?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“It is rather severe. As the fourth largest school in the Master Teacher Academy, there are over twenty thousand students who chose beast tamer as their main supporting occupation. Other than those who are currently out on missions, all of them have participated in the battle. More than half of them are wounded, but the death toll is still relatively low at around a dozen,” Zhao Bingxu replied grimly.

“There are already around a dozen dead?” Zhang Xuan’s body stiffened.

“That’s right.” The one who replied this time around wasn’t Zhao Bingxu but School Head Mo.

While they were speaking, the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast had already arrived at the air space above Hongyuan Mountain Range. Looking down, Zhang Xuan could see countless spirit beasts charging down from the mountaintop, and innumerable students rushed forth to meet them. The battle was extremely intense.

There were many severely wounded students among the group, but they stood firmly on their ground, not backing out at all. Instead, they seemed to grow more and more courageous by the moment, braving through the hordes of spirit beasts fearlessly.

Zhang Xuan’s body couldn’t help but tremble.

He saw two familiar faces. They were Feng Wu and Yu Cheng, whom he had a conflict with during the entrance examination on Leiyuan Peak. At this moment, their bodies were completely drenched in blood, and Yu Cheng even had an arm of his snapped off. Yet, they still continued to charge toward the enemies fearlessly with reddened eyes.

This posed a stark contrast to the selfish behavior they had displayed while competing with him back then.

Whether they were once friend or foe, at this very moment, everyone was fighting side-by-side, trusting their allies with their back.

Taking a glance at Zhang Xuan's astonished face, School Head Mo said proudly, "Many of them have grudges with one another, and from time to time, they fought and sometimes even resorted to despicable means against one another, but... in the face of trouble, they will still unite together as one and fight alongside one another fearlessly, even if death is what they will ultimately face!

"This is because this is their mission and responsibility. This is because they bear a common identity..."

"Master teacher!"

877 Heart of a Teacher

“Master teacher?” Zhang Xuan’s body stiffened.

It had been half a year since his transcension, and he had encountered many different master teachers in his time. Be it a normal 1-star master teacher or a powerful 6-star pinnacle master teacher, be it joy, anger, sorrow, or pleasure, all of them possessed emotions like an ordinary human being, and they had their own desires and goals that they pursued as well.

Despite being a master teacher himself, he had never felt how heavy the occupation was. However, upon seeing this sight, he finally understood what being a master teacher meant to these men.

For mankind, they were willing to put aside their differences and lay down their lives when the time came.

All because they were master teachers!

They were only two mere words, but they carried heavy significance behind them—the hope of mankind.

“That’s right!” Zhao Bingxu nodded. “Being a master teacher is more than about glory, it is a responsibility. Take Lu Feng for example, he has already applied to head for the Subterranean Gallery! Even if he might meet his end there, he is still determined to protect his dignity as a master teacher!”

“Subterranean Gallery?” Zhang Xuan’s body trembled.

He had read about it in the books, so he knew very well what kind of place it was.

The Subterranean Gallery was the passageway connecting the Master Teacher Continent to the world of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, as well as a dangerous battlefield where one could easily lose one’s life in a moment of carelessness. Lu Feng... had volunteered to head to the Subterranean Gallery?

Even if Lu Feng was stripped of his master teacher license, he could still live lavishly with his prowess as a Half-Spiritual

Perception realm expert. Yet, he had chosen to veer down this difficult path to guard his honor instead!

“The reason School Head Lu spoke on You Xu’s behalf was due to their close ties. Such emotions are ingrained in all humans, and it has never been the Master Teacher Pavilion’s aim to destroy human nature. In fact, Kong shi even encouraged the development of each person’s unique character instead, saying that it was the true way to further the prosperity of mankind! If other master teachers lose their individuality and act as if they were cast from the same mold, that would turn into a disaster for mankind instead!” School Head Mo said.

“This...” Words couldn’t express Zhang Xuan’s current emotions.

There are no humans who aren’t born with emotions, and they served as the key to drive us further, allowing us to exceed our limits.

If one were to destroy the human character in pursuit of perfection, even without the intervention of the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe, we would have already limited and destroyed ourselves.

Perhaps, this was the reason the Master Teacher Academy condoned conflicts among the students, allowing them to sort things out among themselves.

“Master teachers can be selfish. They may choose to side with their kin and friends against justice, and they may come to blows over a treasure as well, but... in dire times like this, they have to put aside their differences and charge forward bravely. This is the responsibility of all master teachers, as well as the vision Kong shi had in mind when he established the Master Teacher Pavilion!” School Head Mo continued.

“So, this is a master teacher!” Zhang Xuan muttered as he closed his eyes.

He had met many master teachers on his journey. There were those who were kind and upright, but there were also those who were greedy and selfish. He had thought that master

teachers were no different from anyone else, but his thoughts had been wrong all along.

Master teachers could be selfish, greedy, and even narrow-minded. But when the survival of mankind was at stake, they would be the first to step forward and shoulder the burden.

This is what a master teacher has to do and must do.

In that instant, Zhang Xuan felt as if his soul had been cleansed and initiated.

He was a transcender, and in the world he had come from, many of the fine cultural traditions had already eroded. Students no longer respected their teacher, and teachers no longer felt pride in their occupation. Some of them even committed unforgivable acts that a teacher should never commit.

After coming to this world, Zhang Xuan had gotten a glimpse of the nobility of the occupation. But nevertheless, his subconscious mind still retained the view he had from his previous life.

It was only in this instant that he realized the responsibilities he shouldered from the moment he had chosen to bear this identity!

Kacha!

A crisp crack sounded from Zhang Xuan's chest, and as if a caterpillar breaking out of its cocoon, a unique and solemn power fell from the sky and onto him. At that moment, it felt as if he was a divine being descending from the heavens.

“Could this be...”

Noticing the changes surrounding Zhang Xuan, Zhao Bingxu and School Head Mo traded glances, and their eyes abruptly narrowed. With a quivering voice, they uttered simultaneously, “Heart of a Teacher!”

Heart of a Teacher, just like the Eye of Insight, was a unique ability that only master teachers could comprehend. Only those who persisted in their path as a true teacher would be able to comprehend this ability and reach greater heights.

Legend had it that only 8-star master teachers could comprehend this ability, but to think that... Zhang shi would comprehend it despite only being a 4-star master teacher!

A person with the Heart of a Teacher was no longer confined by the boundaries of race. His Impartation of Heaven's Will would be effective on even savage beasts and spirit beasts, allowing him to turn them into his students, achieving, in the truest sense, enlightenment devoid of discrimination.

Back then, Kong shi had comprehended the Heart of a Teacher as well, as his students didn't just consist of humans but beasts and even Otherworldly Demons as well.

In a sense, a person who had comprehended the Heart of a Teacher could be considered to be nearly on par with a Celestial Master Teacher!

"Principal Zhang actually managed to comprehend the Heart of a Teacher... It seems like the rise of our Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy is just on the horizon," School Head Mo said as his body trembled in agitation.

Even in the entire history of the Master Teacher Pavilion, only a handful had managed to comprehend the Heart of a Teacher. Yet, their principal had actually succeeded in comprehend it! Just based on this in itself, he would surely accomplish great things in the future.

Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy would also make its mark on the world, becoming a sacred land where all master teachers desired to head to.

School Head Mo swiftly set up a barrier around him with a wave of his hand to conceal what was happening within before turning to Zhao Bingxu.

"School Head Zhao, the matter concerning Principal Zhang comprehending the Heart of a Teacher has great implications. If he were to be targeted by the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe due to this matter, we would become sinners of mankind!"

It would only be a matter of time for a master teacher who had comprehended the Heart of a Teacher to advance through the

ranks, becoming one of the powerhouses of the Master Teacher Pavilion.

Thus, if the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe were to learn of such an existence, they would surely hunt that person down with their full force. For Principal Zhang's safety, they must keep this matter a secret.

"Don't worry. I swear on my identity as a master teacher that I will not tell a single soul about this matter," Zhao Bingxu vowed.

"I also swear to do the same on my identity as a master teacher!" School Head Mo nodded.

While they were talking, the unique power finally vanished, and Zhang Xuan slowly opened his eyes. Unlike before, there was a resolute glint in his gaze.

As one who had comprehended Heart of a Teacher, the confusion that had plagued him before had disappeared, and he understood what he should and shouldn't do.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan said calmly, "School Head Mo, propose a ceasefire with the beasts of Cloudmist Ridge. Tell them that the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy wishes to negotiate with them!"

"Negotiate?"

The two school heads were taken aback for an instant before School Head Mo hurriedly exclaimed in astonishment, "You can't do that! The reason we refused to tell you about this matter before is because we feared that you would do this! None of us can bear the consequences if something happens to you!"

"Indeed! It isn't easy for a principal who has the approval of Mu Shi and the entirety of the Ten Great Master Teachers to appear. You are the one who will unite the Master Teacher Academy and bring it to greater heights; we can't afford to lose you!" Zhao Bingxu added.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. "Won't my identity be revealed tomorrow in the inauguration ceremony anyway?"

Since his identity was going to be revealed the following day, what harm would it do if others were to learn of his identity a day before?

“That isn’t the same! After the inauguration ceremony, you will be qualified to wield the Principal’s Seal, and it will help to ensure your safety... No matter what you say, I won’t allow you to reveal your identity now!” School Head Mo exclaimed.

“Principal’s Seal?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“That’s right. Infused in the Principal’s Seal is the will of the students and teachers of the Master Teacher Academy. Even if the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe attempts to harm you, they will be kept at bay by the power of the Principal’s Seal. Only with that can your safety be guaranteed!” School Head Mo explained.

“If that’s the case... did the missing old principal possess the Principal’s Seal?”

“Of course!”

“Then how did he go missing?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“This...” School Head Mo was unable to answer that question.

Gesturing at the many master teachers charging forth bravely below, Zhang Xuan said, “Danger is always existent. Since even the students below aren’t afraid, what do I have to fear?”

He was a master teacher just like the rest of them. Since they could face death without fear, what did he have to hesitate over?

After a moment of hesitation, School Head Mo eventually relented. “Fine, I will do as you have said. However, I will be proposing a negotiation in the name of School Head Zhao and myself instead. I hope that you can understand our concerns!”

Even if Zhang Shi didn’t fear death, they couldn’t allow the Master Teacher Academy to lose its principal once more.

“Un.” Knowing that this was the bottom line of the other party, Zhang Xuan agreed to it.

Retracting the barrier from the surroundings, School Head Mo leaped off the back of the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast and stopped in midair. Taking a deep breath, he roared, “The kings of Cloudmist Ridge. I, Mo Zhu, propose a negotiation with you as the representative of the Master Teacher Academy!”

Hong long!

As if a massive wave, his voice swept across the entire mountain range, reaching the ears of each and every being in the area.

“Negotiate?”

“Why should we negotiate? These beasts have trampled on the dignity of mankind; we can’t let them go so easily!”

“Indeed! How can we face the many master teachers who have been wounded or even killed in this conflict if we negotiate with them?”

...

Upon hearing that School Head Mo was proposing a negotiation, a huge uproar immediately broke out amid the master teachers below.

Proposing a negotiation was a sign of weakness!

If the Master Teacher Academy, facing the onslaught of the beasts, were to choose to negotiate instead of returning the favor back to them, what would become of their dignity?

A powerful voice boomed from the back of the spirit beast stampede.

“You want to negotiate? Fine by us. Come to the Cloudmist Ridge, we will give you a chance to negotiate all you want!”

It was likely that the one speaking was one of the most powerful existences among the saint beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge, their ‘king’.

“They want to hold the negotiations on the Cloudmist Ridge? School Head Mo, you mustn’t agree to their demands!”

“That has got to be a trap!”

“If even our school head is captured by them, we will never be able to raise our heads before others anymore!”

...

The master teachers panicked.

It was clear that the other party was up to no good.

The Cloudmist Ridge was their den, and if School Head Mo were to head over, he would be encircled by countless Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, and Saint realm beasts. Should negotiations break down, he wouldn't even have the chance to escape!

Moreover, as the side proposing the negotiation, they were already in a disadvantageous position. If they were to negotiate on the other party's territory on top of that, wouldn't they simply be exploited?

The Master Teacher Academy served as a pillar of support for mankind, so how could it bow its head to others like that?

If word were to spread, wouldn't it create a huge uproar among the population?

“Principal Zhang...”

While a huge commotion was going on beneath them, School Head Mo turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan hesitantly.

He also felt that it was too dangerous to negotiate in their territory as well.

“Accept it!” Zhang Xuan said calmly.

Zhao Bingxu hurriedly clasped his fist.

“Principal Zhang, it's too dangerous. We can think of some other solutions...”

“There is no need for that. If we don't enter their den, how can we meet their kings?” Zhang Xuan waved his hands resolutely, signifying that this matter wasn't open for discussion.

“This...” School Head Mo and School Head Zhao traded gazes and sighed.

That was indeed the case.

The saint beasts treasured their lives dearly, or else, they wouldn't have had the spirit beasts charge at the frontlines in their stead either.

If they were to turn down the negotiation, they wouldn't have any other opportunity to meet the other party's kings.

"Fine, we agree," School Head Mo bellowed back.

Knowing that Zhang Xuan's mind was made up, the both of them could only resign themselves to it. They solemnly vowed that they would protect and send Zhang Xuan out of the Cloudmist Ridge safely, even at the cost of their lives.

"What? School Head Mo, you can't!"

"School Head Mo, this won't do. They are lying!"

Hearing those words, the master teachers below yelled in panic.

"Enough! This is the decision made by the Master Teacher Academy. All master teachers, retreat and assemble at Leiyuan Peak!" School Head Mo roared.

878 Returning to Cloudmist Ridge

“Yes!”

Even though the master teachers felt indignant and frustrated, they knew that they had to obey the orders made by the Master Teacher Academy or else there would be chaos. Thus, they withdrew from the battlefield and headed to Leiyuan Peak.

Watching as the students retreated, Zhang Xuan instructed, “School Head Zhao, you should remain behind to command the students. They need a leader to unite them at a moment like this. Try to avoid all confrontations with the spirit beasts for the time being if possible. It will suffice for just School Head Mo and me to head to the negotiations!”

Hearing that Zhang Xuan was sending him away, Zhao Bingxu hurriedly shook his head. “That won’t do; I will follow you to the Cloudmist Ridge as well!”

Even though their principal had made huge progress in his cultivation recently, he was still only at Chrysalis realm primary stage. With the other party’s current cultivation, heading into the Cloudmist Ridge, which was filled with saint beasts, was no different from courting death. Even at the expense of his life, Zhao Bingxu was determined to follow the other party to ensure his safety.

“Are you going to disobey my orders right after nominating me as your principal?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

“If you are unwilling to listen to my commands, the two of you might as well remain here. I will head in myself!”

“Principal Zhang...” Zhao Bingxu frowned in worry.

“School Head Zhao, those students do need you with them, so you should go. Don’t worry, I will make sure that no one harms Principal Zhang,” School Head Mo said.

In the next moment, he sent a telepathic message to Zhao Bingxu. “After you return, reorganize our forces and find Mu shi and the others. Four hours; if we don’t return in four hours, launch an attack against the Cloudmist Ridge. I will remain by Principal Zhang’s side to ensure his safety for the next four hours!”

“This...” Zhao Bingxu was taken aback for an instant before he nodded grimly. “Alright then, I will be heading off now!”

Zhang Xuan could tell that the duo had communicated telepathically as well, but he didn’t pay it any heed. Standing on top of the Infernal Dragon Saint Beast, he and School Head Zhao began heading for the Cloudmist Ridge.

Zhao Bingxu watched their departing backs with clenched fists for a moment before rushing back to the Master Teacher Academy.

“Principal Zhang, no harm can come to you...”

He knew that their principal was proposing this negotiation for the sake of the students of the Master Teacher Academy. It might seem as if he was undermining the authority and dignity of the academy, but this battle had come too suddenly, and they were largely unprepared. This was the best solution to preserve their fighting power at the moment.

To bear the blame of failure so as to protect his fellow master teachers from harm, such decisiveness and courage...

They had indeed chosen the right candidate for the job!

Zhang shi was indeed a person whom they could count on, a true master teacher who, just like Kong shi, possessed a heart that was large enough to embrace the world.

Perhaps, they might just become witnesses to the birth of a new legend.

...

The Inferno Dragon Saint Beast flew swiftly, and in just a few moments, they had already arrived at the Cloudmist Ridge.

Standing tall on top of the saint beast, School Head Mo bellowed, “I, Mo Zhu of the Master Teacher Academy, have

come as agreed. I ask the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge to meet me!”

A composed voice responded.

“Ride on the Eagle Beast, he will bring you to us. As for your saint beast, leave him outside. I fear that we might end up putting him in a difficult position if negotiations fail!”

School Head Mo’s Inferno Dragon Saint Beast was a beast as well. If negotiations were to break down, it would be cast in a difficult position. If it were to help its master, that would be equivalent to betraying his kin, but if he were to help the beasts, that would be equivalent to betraying his master. No matter what he did, there was no correct decision.

“Alright!”

After issuing some instructions telepathically to his tamed beast, School Head Mo wrapped Zhang Xuan with his zhenqi before leaping over to the back of the gray-feathered Eagle Beast not too far away.

Qiuu!

The Eagle Beast let out a sharp call before it spread its wings wide and flew forward.

The Eagle Beast bore some resemblance to the Viridescent Eagle that Zhang Xuan had tamed before, but it was much stronger. Having reached Chrysalis realm, it was able to move at incredible speeds.

“Principal Zhang, for the time being, let’s just say that you are a student of mine. If they try to make things difficult for us, I will try to find a way to send you out safely,” School Head Mo told Zhang Xuan telepathically.

Zhang Xuan shook his head. “There is no need to go through so much trouble. If I don’t reveal my identity, how can we negotiate with them?”

“That would be too dangerous.” School Head Mo shook his head grimly.

“These saint beasts have always been at odds with us humans, and it was just a matter of time before a battle broke out. In

truth, our Master Teacher Academy has been looking for a way to eliminate them as well, but those fellows are constantly holed up in their dens, refusing to come out. Both the Master Teacher Academy and the royal family have dispatched many men to scout the depths of the Cloudmist Ridge over the years, but very few have managed to return alive...”

“Dispatched many men?” Zhang Xuan frowned as he recalled the many corpses he had seen around the lake of Earth Vein Spirit Essence back then.

Most likely, those corpses were probably a squadron dispatched by the royal family or the Master Teacher Academy as well.

“The Cloudmist Ridge is consistently covered in mist all year round, and its terrain is extremely complicated as well, making it a stout natural fortress. The saint beasts gathered in the area are like a thorn stuck in our throat, posing a potential threat to us. We have been wanting to eliminate them for some time already, but it’s a pity that we have been unable to breach their defenses!”

At this point, School Head Mo suddenly recalled something, and his complexion turned grim. “Furthermore, there seems to be a deeper reason behind why the saint beasts choose to dominate the Cloudmist Ridge. The old principal seemed to have uncovered something about them, but he disappeared before he could tell anyone else about it. Also, according to the investigations over the years, it seems like Elder Wu Yangzi’s disappearance also had something to do with the Cloudmist Ridge!”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes.

He had a rough understanding of the mystery concerning Wu Yangzi’s disappearance, and he had obtained the latter’s treasure as well. If the Cloudmist Ridge was involved in Wu Yangzi’s disappearance too, it could mean that the Otherworldly Demonic Tribe was behind them.

Could... Vicious be involved in this matter as well?

After obtaining Wu Yangzi's treasure, Zhang Xuan had asked Vicious about this matter, but the latter had lost most of his memories, so he wasn't able to say much.

However, it was certain that Wu Yangzi's disappearance was plotted by the Otherworldly Demons... Were these saint beasts involved in the operation as well?

That might really be the case!

For an expert who was nearing Saint 2-dan to be kidnapped discreetly in Hongyuan City, where the Master Teacher Academy was located, it was impossible for the Otherworldly Demons to conduct such an operation by themselves.

"In order to uncover the truth, we have dispatched even Saint realm experts into the Cloudmist Ridge, but none of them succeeded. Seven hundred years ago, I tried to scout this land myself as well, and if not for the old principal, I might have just lost my life here," School Head Mo said with reddened eyes.

When he was still young and hot-blooded, he had secretly crept into the Cloudmist Ridge in hopes of uncovering the secrets surrounding it. However, before he could get far, he had already found himself assaulted by hordes of beasts.

If not for the old principal lending a helping hand, he would have lost his life then.

"I see..." Zhang Xuan hadn't expected for School Head Mo to have had such an experience.

He had ventured into the Cloudmist Ridge once as well, and there was indeed something rather bizarre about it.

Were it not for his means as a soul oracle and his Otherworldly Demon puppets, he would have definitely been unable to sneak into the depths of the Cloudmist Ridge and steal the Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

"Thus, you really mustn't reveal your identity later on. Otherwise, the saint beasts might just attempt to capture you and hold you hostage," School Head Mo said.

"Un, alright then." Zhang Xuan nodded.

Considering the many uncertainties and implications surrounding the matter, it would be very dangerous for him to reveal his true identity.

Even with the Byzantium Helios Beast, the Golden Origin Cauldron, and his many Otherworldly Demon puppets, it would still be difficult for him to escape from the hordes of Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, and Saint realm beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge.

While the duo was speaking, the Eagle Beast flew across the mist and arrived on the mountain peak.

Taking a closer look, Zhang Xuan realized that the surroundings looked familiar to him. It was the place where he had procured the Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

Qiu!

The Eagle Beast called out sharply before descending to the ground. After which, School Head Mo and Zhang Xuan leaped off the back of the Eagle Beast.

“I, Mo Zhu of the Master Teacher Academy, have arrived with my student. I beseech the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge to meet us!”

Stepping forward, School Head Mo exuded the impressive aura of a Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle to put up a display of power.

“School Head Mo, come in.”

An impassive voice sounded from the cavern ahead of them. Following which, two Half-Saint Black Spirit Panther walked out and made a welcoming gesture. They seemed to be the guards of this cavern.

“Let’s go!”

Taking a deep breath, School Head Mo took the lead and walked in, and Zhang Xuan followed behind him.

Scanning his surroundings, Zhang Xuan noticed that there were many Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts guarding the area, similar to how it had been the last time he was there, except for the significant decrease in their numbers.

It seemed like a handful of them had been dispatched for the battle with the Master Teacher Academy.

Advancing deeper into the cavern, they soon arrived at the area where the Earth Vein Spirit Essence had been stored, and there, they met ten seated Saint 1-dan pinnacle saint beasts.

As soon as School Head Mo and Zhang Xuan approached, they immediately turned their eyes to them, and there was chilling killing intent in their gazes.

One of the ten Saint 1-dan pinnacle saint beasts, a Golden Beartiger Beast, uttered coldly, “Mo Zhu, you sure are arrogant to bring a Chrysalis realm student here!”

As the head of the Beast Tamer School, School Head Mo had a rough idea regarding the various saint beasts that lived on the Cloudmist Ridge.

Paying no heed to the Golden Beartiger Beast, School Head Mo said with a wave of his hand, “Since I am here, we can begin talking about how we can resolve the battle between the Master Teacher Academy and Cloudmist Ridge amicably. I believe that we can both agree that if we continue fighting like that, both sides will just suffer severe losses. There will be no winner in this battle.”

“Suffer severe losses? So what if we suffer severe losses? You humans stole our Earth Vein Spirit Essence, destroying our very foundation! Let me tell you this straight. If we beasts are going to suffer, I will make sure that you humans feel double the pain!” the Saint 1-dan pinnacle Scarlet Blaze Lion roared.

“We stole your Earth Vein Spirit Essence?” School Head Mo frowned.

“Indeed. This is the ground where we store our Earth Vein Spirit Essence, but it has been completely emptied out now. Only you despicable humans are capable of such underhanded actions!” the Scarlet Blaze Lion bellowed furiously.

School Head Mo took a look at his surroundings, and there was indeed a depression in the cave reminiscent of an empty lake. Even though there was nothing in it, he could still feel the lingering spiritual energy, indicating that something

extremely rich in spiritual energy had once been stored in the depression.

But this was the very core of the Cloudmist Ridge! Countless Nascent Saint and Saint realm beasts guarded the area. To be able to steal the spirit essence under such circumstances... which expert could it be?

One must know that School Head Mo had already reached a considerable height in his cultivation when he had attempted to scale the mountain back then, but he had nearly been killed before he could even reach the halfway mark of the mountain.

To be able to successfully sneak in, steal the treasure of the saint beasts, and escape alive... That fellow sure had helped mankind vent the countless years of pent-up frustration at those arrogant saint beasts!

“I am unaware of such a matter.”

But even though School Head Mo was full of awe for that anonymous expert, he didn't allow it to show on his face. Instead, he frowned deeply and asked, “You claimed that it is the doing of a human, but do you have any evidence? Have you uncovered the culprit yet?”

“Hah, unaware of the matter? Do you think that you can cover this matter just by saying that you are unaware of it?” The Golden Beartiger Beast harrumphed.

“I am not trying to cover up the matter. It's just that if you don't have any evidence or suspects in mind, there is no way I can help you redress your grievances. I don't think that we will be able to get anywhere by arguing about that, so let's talk about the battle instead,” School Head Mo said.

“If it's just a small skirmish between us, the Master Teacher Pavilion wouldn't bother getting involved. However, if this matter were to blow up and bring great misery and suffering to the populace, there is no guarantee that the Master Teacher Pavilion won't decide that there is no need for your Cloudmist Ridge to continue existing in the world and wipe it away with a swipe of their hands. Even if I don't point it out, I believe that you should be extremely clear of this as well. Since you

have already lain low for so many years, why start something now and let your efforts go in vain?”

Hearing School Head Mo’s words, the Golden Beartiger Beast sneered coldly and said, “In the past, we still had the Earth Vein Spirit Essence. It represented hope for us to advance our stagnated cultivation, so we were still willing to lie low back then. But now...

“We won’t take reconciliation completely off the table just yet. As long as the Master Teacher Academy is willing to compensate us fifty thousand high-tier spirit stones and help us set up five hundred grade-6 Spirit Gathering Formations all over Cloudmist Ridge, I will order my spirit beasts to retreat immediately!”

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“Fifty thousand high-tier spirit stones? Five hundred grade-6 Spirit Gathering Formations? Impossible, you must be dreaming! Come up with something else!” School Head Mo’s face darkened.

You are clearly trying to take advantage of us!

Fifty thousand high-tier spirit stones? Even if you overturn the entire Master Teacher Academy, you won’t be able to find that much money!

Besides, it is not like our Master Teacher Academy is afraid of you. It is only in consideration of the death and suffering that a full-blown war will bring that we are negotiating with you. If it really comes down to it, we can definitely overthrow your Cloudmist Ridge if we mobilize all of our strength.

“Come up with something else? I’m afraid that those are the only things I want. Accept it or not, the decision is in your hands. But of course, if you turn down the offer, the war will immediately resume. I haven’t mobilized our aerial spirit beasts yet. Once we do, do you think that your students who are still incapable of flight will be able to stop them? Once they reach Hongyuan City, the death toll won’t be just a dozen people or so. I sure would like to see how you will account to your headquarters and the populace once that happens!” the Golden Beartiger Beast sneered coldly.

Master teachers were tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the peace and security of the region. If aerial spirit beasts were to really overrun Hongyuan City and massacre the populace, the credibility of the Master Teacher Academy would surely be destroyed.

At the same time, the trust in the Master Teacher Pavilion’s capability would also waver.

“Are you threatening me?” School Head Mo asked with a cold glint in his eyes.

For the Master Teacher Academy to be threatened by a bunch of saint beasts, what a joke!

The dignity of master teachers could not be sullied.

Those weren't just empty words. If anyone were to dare do so, the Master Teacher Pavilion wouldn't hesitate to wipe them off the face of the world.

Back then, the soul oracles had been a very powerful faction themselves, but they had still disappeared in the annals of history.

The poison masters were also known for their fearsome capability to defeat opponents stronger than them, but they still dared not build their Poison Hall openly.

No matter what, School Head Mo couldn't let this threat pass. But just as he was about to lash out at them, he suddenly heard Principal Zhang's voice in his mind. "Find a way to uncover the location of their aerial spirit beasts and send me over to take a look!"

School Head Mo was stunned.

Why would Principal Zhang ask this? Furthermore, why would he want to take a look at the aerial spirit beasts?

But since the other party had requested it, he must have had his reasons for doing so. Thus, with a deep frown on his face, School Head Mo turned to the Golden Beartiger Beast and sneered, "So what if there are aerial spirit beasts in the Cloudmist Ridge? We have hundreds of cultivators capable of flight in our Master Teacher Academy, what makes you think that we won't be able to stop your forces? Even if you wish to threaten us, at least find something that can scare us!"

"Hah, hundreds of cultivators capable of flight? Let me tell you this, our Cloudmist Ridge has three thousand aerial spirit beasts, and each of them is capable of flying at incredible speeds. There might be many Saint realm experts in the Master Teacher Academy, but there is no way they will be able to stop every single one of them. As long as several hundred of them bypass your defenses, they will be able to bring forth devastating destruction. Besides, we can choose to launch an

attack on the nearby small towns instead. I don't believe that you have enough Saint realm experts to clear off each and every one of them quickly!" the Golden Beartiger Beast sneered coldly, his tone dripping with threat.

"Three thousand?" School Head Mo burst into laughter. "Do you take me for a fool? Are you including those Transcendent Mortal 1-dan and 2-dan aerial spirit beasts in your calculation as well?"

Aerial spirit beasts were capable of causing massive destruction as ordinary cultivators were incapable of flying to hunt them down.

However, the strength of the aerial spirit beasts mattered as well. If they were only at Transcendent Mortal 1-dan or 2-dan, what harm could they cause in Hongyuan Empire, which was filled with Transcendent Mortal cultivators?

The Master Teacher Academy could easily destroy them all just by dispatching a few students here and there.

"Transcendent Mortal 1-dan 2-dan? School Head Mo, it seems like you are lacking intelligence on the prowess of our Cloudmist Ridge. Even the weakest of our three thousand strong aerial spirit beast troop is at Transcendent Mortal 7-dan! Do you still think that your Master Teacher Academy has the ability to stop them in their tracks?" the Golden Beartiger Beast scoffed.

"Transcendent Mortal 7-dan? You sure know how to brag!" School Head Mo shook his head with a look of disbelief.

"You don't believe me?" The Golden Beartiger Beast frowned.

"How can you expect me to believe such blatant lies? Since you are clearly insincere in the negotiations, I think there is no need for us to talk any further!"

At this point, School Head Mo hesitated for an instant before adding, "If you want me to believe your words, there is one way. You can send a saint beast to escort this student of mine to take a look. If you really do have that many powerful aerial spirit beasts, I will immediately send a message to the other

school heads and even Emperor Yu Shenqing to ask for permission to negotiate in their stead.”

The Golden Beartiger Beast raised his massive paw and harrumphed. “You obstinate old fogey... Fine! Black Spirit Panthers, take the student of School Head Mo to take a look at our army of aerial spirit beasts!”

Even though he had spoken with great bravado, the truth was that he was also fearful about the might of the Master Teacher Academy as well.

As an organization that had groomed many generations of master teachers, it was surely filled with many experts. If it was just the students, he was confident that they would be able to wipe them out easily. However, if the opponent included the teachers and elders as well, even with the geographical advantage they possessed, it would still be a matter of time before they were overrun.

Furthermore, the Master Teacher Academy still had the headquarters behind it. Even if they were to win the battle against the Master Teacher Academy by some incredible stroke of luck, what they would face next would be an impossible enemy.

In light of this, they couldn't give up on the negotiations easily either.

“Roar!”

The two Half-Saint realm Black Spirit Panthers answered with a call before heading toward them.

“School Head Mo, try to stall them for as long as you can, and don't engage them in a battle if possible. Take care of yourself...” Sending a telepathic message to School Head Mo, Zhang Xuan turned around and followed the Black Spirit Panthers out of the cavern.

“Noted!”

Even though School Head Mo was unsure what Zhang Xuan was up to, he still had some trust in Zhang Xuan's capability. He turned to the Golden Beartiger Beast and said, “If the situation is as you have said, I will report the matter as it is to

the Master Teacher Academy before making a decision. I can't give you an affirmative answer right now, but if you really do have such a powerful army of aerial spirit beasts, it is not entirely impossible for us to give in to your terms..."

"Oh? I will be looking forward to your reply then!" the Golden Beartiger Beast replied with a smirk.

At the same time, a hint of relief flashed through the eyes of the other saint beasts in the area as well.

If they could avoid battle, that would be for the best.

As powerful as they were, they knew that it was utter foolishness to go head-to-head with the Master Teacher Pavilion.

For that moment, the cavern fell silent. Seeing that he had managed to stall for some time, School Head Mo secretly heaved a sigh of relief. At the same time, he couldn't help but wonder what Zhang Xuan hoped to achieve by paying the army of aerial spirit beasts a visit.

It would be difficult to deal with such a force even if all of the teachers of the Master Teacher Academy were to be mobilized. What could Zhang Xuan do alone?

...

Following behind the two Black Spirit Panthers, Zhang Xuan walked out of the cavern and saw dozens of Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts patrolling the area, glaring at him viciously whenever they passed him by.

"Esteemed beasts, my cultivation is still very low... I am afraid that these saint beasts will do me harm if they remain in this area... Can you ask them to back down for the moment?" Zhang Xuan said as he cowered back fearfully.

"Roar!"

Seeing a Chrysalis realm master teacher acting so timidly, the lips of the two Black Spirit Panthers curled up into a disdainful smile.

"It was my teacher who insisted on bringing me over and sending me to check on the aerial spirit beasts. If I had a

choice, I would have definitely stayed away as far as I could... I beseech you, just do me this one favor. As long as they can stay away, I am willing to give these two spirit stones to you..." At this point, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and threw out two high-tier spirit stones as he scanned his surroundings unwarily.

Grabbing a high-tier spirit stone each, the eyes of the two Black Spirit Panthers immediately lit up.

As Half-Saint beasts, the resources they could access were extremely limited. As such, a high-tier spirit stone was a highly valuable item to them.

"Roar!"

Gripping the high-tier spirit stones, the two massive Black Spirit Panthers abruptly roared loudly, seemingly issuing an order.

In an instant, the Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts in the area hurriedly backed off, and it didn't take long for them to disappear from sight.

While the Black Spirit Panthers weren't the strongest of them all, they were the personal attendants of the various kings of the Cloudmist Ridge, so none of them dared to disobey their commands.

"Roar!" After the beasts in the surroundings left, the two Black Spirit Panthers glanced at Zhang Xuan with a look of superiority in their eyes. What they wanted to express was simple—How did someone so timid become a master teacher?

"Hehe!" Facing their ridicule, Zhang Xuan chuckled lightly as he flicked his wrist.

Hu!

An identical figure abruptly appeared beside Zhang Xuan's side, and with a step each, they disappeared from the spot and appeared right before the two Black Spirit Panthers in the blink of an eye and simultaneously threw a punch forward!

Peng! Peng!

Everything had happened so fast that the two Black Spirit Panthers had no opportunity to respond before they were sent flying. Crashing into the ground, their bodies convulsed, rendering them unable to move.

“You have two choices before you. Submit, or die!”

The two Zhang Xuans walked up to the two Black Spirit Panthers and stepped on their heads as they glanced down at them coldly.

“Roar...”

They hadn't expected that they, as Half-Saint experts, would be defeated by a Chrysalis realm cultivator all of a sudden, and they were completely stunned.

It didn't take too long for them to make a decision. A few breaths later, a droplet of fresh blood flew out from glabellas of each of the Black Spirit Panthers and flew toward Zhang Xuan.

Black Spirit Panthers... tamed!

“Good. Call those Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts over here one by one. Tell them that the Golden Beartiger Beast is summoning them over!” Zhang Xuan instructed the tamed Black Spirit Panthers.

“Roar!”

Not daring to disobey Zhang Xuan, the two Black Spirit Panthers hurriedly nodded before rushing away.

After they left, Zhang Xuan summoned the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron.

“Byzantium Lad and Ding Ding, I will need you to help me beat those saint beasts into submission later on.”

“Yes, Master!” the Byzantium Helios Beast nodded.

“Hehe, this is exactly the kind of thing I like. Master, can I reduce those who refuse to submit to cinders?” the Golden Origin Cauldron said with an excited undertone in its voice.

As the Guardian Saint Artifact of the Master Teacher Academy, it was usually stowed away in the depths of the

academy until a major crisis occurred. As such, it rarely had an opportunity to fight.

“You may.” Zhang Xuan nodded, acceding to the Golden Origin Cauldron’s request.

The reason he had chosen to infiltrate the Cloudmist Ridge was to have everyone here submit to him. As for those who refused... the only fate awaiting them was death!

Roar!

Soon, a Nascent Saint beast was escorted there by the Black Spirit Panther. Two minutes later, it was kneeling before Zhang Xuan, submitted.

A few minutes later, three more Half-Saint beasts submitted.

Ten minutes later, all of the Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts patrolling the area were under Zhang Xuan’s control.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan issued several instructions. “Alright. Just like before, scatter yourselves in the surroundings, don’t let anyone else notice any anomaly. Black Spirit Panthers, bring me to the aerial spirit beasts!”

These Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts were easier to tame than he had thought. There were only two who had refused to listen to his words, and they had been reduced to cinders on the spot by the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Such an action had a deterrent effect on the other beasts. Knowing that the young man before them wouldn’t hesitate to kill them should they choose otherwise, the others hurriedly submitted as well.

The Black Spirit Panthers obediently led the way forward. “Master, the aerial spirit beasts are gathered in the valley over there...”

Zhang Xuan stowed his clone, the Byzantium Helios Beast, and the Golden Origin Cauldron into his Myriad Anthive Nest before leaping onto one of the Black Spirit Panthers and setting forth.

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The area where the aerial spirit beasts were located wasn't in close proximity to the cavern. Even with the Black Spirit Panther sprinting at full speed, it still took an entire five minutes before they arrived at their destination.

Beneath their feet was a massive valley with a diameter of around three li[1].

Activating his Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan peered into the valley.

Just as the Golden Beartiger Beast had said, there were indeed three thousand of them, and every single one of them had reached Transcendent Mortal 7-dan at the very least.

If such a huge group of aerial spirit beasts were to launch an assault toward Hongyuan City, it would indeed be difficult for any defending force to stop their charge perfectly.

In the event of an attack, even if they did successfully clear away every single one of them in the end, Hongyuan City would probably suffer devastating damage as well.

I have to set up a formation to ensure that none of them manage to escape! Zhang Xuan thought.

There were simply too many aerial spirit beasts in the area. If any of them noticed that something was amiss and escaped to inform the Golden Beartiger Beast of the matter, School Head Mo would be placed in a very dangerous position.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan began scanning his surroundings to analyze how he should set up his formation. This geographical terrain seems to be suited for the grade-6 Resplendent Helios Illusory Formation! Alright, that shall be it then...

Even though he hadn't taken the formation master examination yet, his comprehension of formations was already on par with a 6-star pinnacle formation master. With his

current capability, he could still easily determine the most appropriate formation to use swiftly by looking at the terrain.

Flicking his wrist, he took out a bunch of formation flags.

After which, he stepped forcefully against the ground and leaped down into the midst of the aerial spirit beasts.

Roarrrr!

Upon seeing that a human was amid them, the aerial spirit beasts roared in astonishment. However, just as they were about to launch an assault to kill the intruder, the two Black Spirit Panthers abruptly leaped up as well and roared, “This is the man who has come here to negotiate with our kings, Zhang shi. He is here to take a look at our aerial spirit beast army camp, as well as set a formation around here. There is no need to be alarmed!”

Those Black Spirit Panthers spoke in the beast language, so the aerial spirit beasts could comprehend what they were saying.

As those speaking were the attendants of their kings, the aerial spirit beasts had no objections whatsoever; they scattered and returned to whatever they were doing before.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Zhang Xuan drove his zhenqi, and the flags in his hands began scattering into the surroundings.

Hu!

As the Resplendent Helios Illusory Formation came to life, a thick mist began to set into the valley, shrouding all of the aerial spirit beasts within it.

Knowing that the young man was going to set up a formation, the aerial spirit beasts didn't panic, waiting for him quietly to finish instead.

“Time to start!”

With a chuckle, Zhang Xuan brought out his clone, and the both of them dived into the mist.

Roar! Roar! Roar!

In an instant, the cries of the aerial spirit beasts immediately filled the valley.

Even the strongest of these aerial spirit beasts was only at Chrysalis realm pinnacle, so they were no match for Zhang Xuan and his clone at all. As such, there wasn't even a need to bring out the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Every few steps Zhang Xuan took, an aerial spirit beast submitted.

...

While Zhang Xuan was busy taming the aerial spirit beasts, in the cavern, School Head Mo's forehead was covered with sweat.

It had been two hours since Zhang Xuan left, and the saint beasts were beginning to get suspicious.

The Golden Beartiger Beast, who stood at the very center of the room, bellowed with a livid face, "Why aren't they back yet? Mo Zhu, what the hell is your student doing?"

A trip to the valley where the aerial spirit beast army was located and back should only take twenty minutes at most. For them to be gone for two hours, it was clear that there was something really wrong.

"My student is only a Chrysalis realm cultivator while your Cloudmist Ridge is filled with many saint beasts, what are you worrying about?"

Even though School Head Mo was panicking inside, he didn't allow any of it to show on his face. With a composed chuckle, he said, "My student is a very meticulous person, so he is probably checking thoroughly to confirm the strength of your aerial spirit beast army. Or... are you worried that he will escape?"

"Escape? Hah! With you here, what can a mere student like him do?"

The Golden Beartiger Beast harrumphed coldly. "Scarlet Blaze Lion, go and check what that fellow is up to! Humans have

always been a cunning race, so don't fall for his lies!"

"Yes!" Nodding, the Scarlet Blaze Lion began to walk out of the cavern.

"Wait a moment..." Astonished, School Head Mo immediately got to his feet. "He is just a student. Are the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge so timid?"

"Timid?" The Golden Beartiger Beast burst into laughter, as if he had just heard a hilarious joke. "Scarlet Blaze Lion, ignore him. Go and take a look!"

Ignoring School Head Mo's attempt to stall for time, the Golden Beartiger Beast gestured for the Scarlet Blaze Lion to move on.

Seeing that the Scarlet Blaze Lion was really going to head out, School Head Mo suddenly chuckled softly and said, "I have long heard that the great Golden Beartiger Beast King of Cloudmist Ridge possesses extraordinary strength. Do you dare to have a match with me? I am interested in experiencing the prowess of the Beast Tribe myself!"

"You are challenging me to a duel?" Not expecting School Head Mo to make such an abrupt request, the Golden Beartiger Beast frowned.

"Pardon me, did I scare you?" School Head Mo said with a wry smile.

"Scare me? You must be joking! If a duel is what you want, a duel is what you'll get!" Harrumphing coldly, the Golden Beartiger Beast got to his feet.

"Good! Scarlet Blaze Lion King, why don't you remain here to watch our battle? You will be next after I am done with Golden Beartiger Beast King!" School Head Mo said haughtily.

Naturally, this was an attempt to stall for time as well. Even though he wasn't sure what Zhang Xuan was up to, he was determined to accomplish what he had promised the latter.

"Sure!" the Scarlet Blaze Lion nodded.

Both School Head Mo and the Golden Beartiger Beast were the strongest existences in Hongyuan Empire. Naturally, watching a battle between the both of them was much more interesting than looking for a Chrysalis realm fellow.

“Let’s begin then!” Fearing that the Golden Beartiger Beast would notice that he was stalling once he was given time to think, School Head Mo rushed forward and thrust his palm at the saint beast.

The incredible might of a Saint 1-dan pinnacle abruptly permeated the entire cavern. With just a single palm, the ground of the cavern began creaking in protest, seemingly on the verge of breaking under the immense force.

“Hahaha! If this is all you’ve got, I have to say that you are a disgrace to the name of ‘Ten Great Master Teachers’...”

Against the immense pressure, the Golden Beartiger Beast didn’t show the slightest fear. Instead, with a furious bellow, he raised his paw and swiped forward, causing the air to release a painful screech as it was torn in two.

Si la!

Under the powerful might, the strength of School Head Mo’s palm thrust was completely neutralized.

In the next instant, the Golden Beartiger Beast furiously flicked its whip-like tail toward School Head Mo. The strength and speed behind it were so great that even with School Head Mo’s Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle cultivation, he would surely suffer severe injuries if it were to land on him.

Hu!

Not daring to face the tail directly, School Head Mo swiftly dodged with a side leap.

Sou!

But in that instant, the Golden Beartiger Beast sent yet another swipe toward School Head Mo.

In the midst of a leap, he was unable to change the trajectory of his motion abruptly, so he could only face the swipe head-on with a punch.

As the paw and the fist came into contact, School Head Mo instantaneously felt a crushing pressure on his chest, and he was sent flying away. His back crashed heavily into the wall of the cavern, creating a huge hole behind him.

Beasts had always possessed superior physical resilience and strength compared to humans, and the Golden Beartiger Beast was the most formidable saint beast in the Cloudmist Ridge. School Head Mo was, by no means, weak, but it was still impossible for him to face the other party head-on.

“Haha, is this the strength of a member of the Ten Great Master Teachers? Nothing impressive about it at all!”

With a deafening roar that jolted one’s mind silly, the Golden Beartiger Beast charged forward with impressive momentum.

As the saying went, the dragons soared amid the clouds, and the tiger raced against the wind.

Even though the Golden Beartiger Beast wasn’t a tiger in the truest sense, it did possess part of its bloodline. Even before the other party had reached him, School Head Mo could already feel a huge gust of wind blowing in his face. Astonished, he quickly freed himself and whipped out a sword to counterattack.

If he was no match for the other party in terms of brute force, he would have to rely on his weapon then.

Sou sou sou!

Moving at an unbelievable speed, the sword left after-shadows in its wake as it charged toward the Golden Beartiger Beast.

In the face of the powerful stab, the Golden Beartiger Beast didn’t even bother to dodge. Instead, it took in a deep breath, and its fur immediately turned pitch-black, reminiscent of a scale.

Ding ding ding!

The tip of the sword and the fur collided with astonishing momentum, but the sword was unable to pierce through the fur!

“What?” School Head Mo’s face paled.

He had known that it was unlikely that he would be a match for the Golden Beartiger Beast, but he hadn't expected the other party to be so powerful!

To think that his sword wouldn't even be able to penetrate the other party's defense, this was way too fearsome!

It was no wonder that, even though the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge were all at Saint 1-dan pinnacle, they still obeyed his orders without the slightest hesitation. Just this defense itself was sufficient to render most saint beasts and cultivators powerless.

“Thirteen Swords of the Red Leaf!”

However, he couldn't back down now. The slightest hesitation in his movement could spell his defeat. School Head Mo immediately drove his zhenqi through a unique circulation pathway in his body, and a piercing buzz emanated from his sword.

In that instant, astounding might gathered in his sword, and it felt as if it would tear down anything that stood in its path.

The Thirteen Swords of the Red Leaf, his strongest battle technique!

Back then, the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast had fallen under this move of his and willingly became his tamed beast.

Tzzzzzz!

In that instant, the after-shadows of the sword seemed to form a red leaf in midair as it rushed forward with a might that threatened to shatter everything before it.

“Interesting! However, if you hope to defeat me with just this, you must be dreaming!”

The Golden Beartiger Beast was slightly astonished for an instant when he saw School Head Mo execute his sword art, but his astonishment swiftly gave way to a wry smile. Sharp claws emerged from his raised paws, and he launched a devastating swipe toward School Head Mo's sword.

Ding ding ding!

The paw and the red leaf collided. The Golden Beartiger Beast was forced to retreat a single step under the immense force, but School Head Mo was sent flying once more as blood spurted from his mouth. His body smashed heavily onto the ground, and his complexion turned ghastly pale from the severe internal injuries he had suffered.

He hurriedly stood up and swallowed a recovery pill, and after a brief moment of recuperation, he finally felt his injuries alleviating slightly.

“How is it? Does my strength satisfy you?” the Golden Beartiger Beast roared with laughter as its gaze fell on the defeated School Head Mo.

Even though it had sustained some injuries from the previous collision as well, its condition was still much better than that of the other party.

This battle had ended with a complete victory on his part.

“You are indeed powerful,” School Head Mo said as he got to his feet.

He truly wasn’t a match for the other party.

Even though they were at the same cultivation realm, it was still too difficult for a cultivator like him to overcome the innate advantages that saint beasts possessed.

Otherwise, the Byzantium Helios Beast wouldn’t have been known as the strongest expert in the Master Teacher Academy.

The Golden Beartiger Beast returned to his seat and commanded, “Alright, since this duel is over, Scarlet Blaze Lion, you can hurry over to see what that lad is up to now. If he is plotting something against the Cloudmist Ridge, you have permission to kill him on the spot!”

“Yes!” The Scarlet Blaze Lion nodded before heading out of the cavern.

“No... wait...”

Hearing those words, School Head Mo panicked. He was going to step forward to stop the Scarlet Blaze Lion, but the Golden Beartiger Beast’s cold words suddenly reverberated

through the cavern at this moment. “Why? Does School Head Mo want to have another round with me?”

“I...” School Head Mo’s body trembled.

With the injuries he had sustained, he couldn’t afford to fight against the Golden Beartiger Beast again. Otherwise, he might just lose his life.

He had no idea whether or not Zhang Xuan was done with whatever he was trying to do, but he was already at his wits’ end. He couldn’t stall the other party any longer...

At this point, the Golden Beartiger Beast had also noticed School Head Mo’s motive, and he bellowed furiously, “What are you waiting for? Go!”

“Yes!” the Scarlet Blaze Lion swiftly rushed out of the cavern, and in a moment, he had already disappeared from sight.

Principal Zhang...

Watching as the other party’s back disappeared, School Head Mo’s body fell feebly to the ground. I have already done all I can...

[1] 1.5 km

881 You, Come out for a Moment!

The Scarlet Blaze Lion rushed out of the cavern and flew straight toward the valley where the aerial spirit beasts were garrisoned. It didn't take him too long to arrive at his destination.

The Scarlet Blaze Lion frowned. "Why is there an Illusory Formation here?"

Standing before him was a gigantic formation that shrouded the entire valley. From time to time, the bellowing of spirit beasts could be heard from within. At the entrance of the valley, the two Black Spirit Panthers, who had escorted that fellow to this valley earlier, stood guard, watching the surroundings warily.

The Scarlet Blaze Lion flew toward the two panthers and gazed at them coldly. "Black Spirit Panthers, what is going on?"

"Scarlet Blaze Lion King..."

Upon seeing the other party, the Black Spirit Panthers leaped in shock. They hurriedly explained, "It's like this... That Zhang shi fellow is a skilled formation master, and as soon as we arrived here, he immediately set up a formation, and before we could comprehend what was going on, he... disappeared! We tried looking around for him, but we couldn't find him anywhere!"

"You fools!" The Scarlet Blaze Lion glared at them.

It was clear that the other party was up to no good from the fact that he had set up a formation here, and these two fellows actually didn't attempt to stop him at all... How could they be so dim-witted?

However, as Illusory Formations couldn't isolate auras, the Scarlet Blaze Lion could clearly sense that the spirit beasts

within were still alive and kicking.

If the other party wasn't intending to deal with the aerial spirit beasts, what was his reason behind setting up this formation?

As the Scarlet Blaze Lion racked his brain to make sense of the situation, the Illusory Formation before him abruptly dissipated, and a young man flew up from the valley.

It was the young fellow he had met earlier, School Head Mo's student.

At this moment, Zhang Xuan's face was slightly pale, and he felt light-headed from exhaustion.

Even for a person of his stamina, he was still drained after spending the last two hours taming aerial spirit beasts.

However, it was fortunate that his mission was a success. He had managed to get all of the aerial spirit beasts to acknowledge him as their master.

Of course, there were a few thick-headed ones who obstinately refused to submit to him. Zhang Xuan didn't have the time to waste his words on them, so he killed them with a single punch.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan emerge from the valley, the Scarlet Blaze Lion roared furiously, "Lad, what were you doing?"

"It's nothing much. Byzantium Lad and Ding Ding, help me take care of this fellow. I have to rest for a moment..."

Zhang Xuan didn't seem to be too surprised to see the Scarlet Blaze Lion at all. He nonchalantly took out a grade-6 pill and swallowed it while flicking his wrist to release the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron.

Upon seeing that there was a Saint 1-dan pinnacle saint beast to play with, the Golden Origin Cauldron cheered in excitement and charged forward.

Peng!

Before the Scarlet Blaze Lion could even react to the situation, he had already been smacked into the face of the mountain, and large mouthfuls of blood spilled from his mouth.

In the next moment, before he could even catch his breath, the huge fist of the Byzantium Helios Beast had already appeared right before his eyes.

Peng peng peng peng!

A saint beast and a Saint-tier artifact, two experts collaborating with one another, there was no way that the Scarlet Blaze Lion could possibly withstand that. In the blink of an eye, his face was already disfigured with bruises and blood. He tried to escape, but his leg couldn't move; he tried to scream, but his voice wouldn't come out.

Not too long later, that fellow ended up obediently acknowledging Zhang Xuan as his master with tears streaming down his cheeks.

What is with my luck? I only came out to take a look, but I ended up being beaten up like this... Where is the justice in the world?

What has happened to respecting the law?

After offering a fragment of his soul to Zhang Xuan, the Scarlet Blaze Lion greeted him with a bruised face. "Master!"

Having recovered from his fatigue at this point, Zhang Xuan commanded as he stretched his back leisurely, "I want you to return to the cavern right now and lure two kings out!"

"Lure two kings out?" The Scarlet Blaze Lion's blinked blankly in response.

"That's right." Zhang Xuan nodded.

There was a total of ten kings in the cavern. If he were to draw all of them out at once, there was no guarantee that he would be able to defeat all of them even with the Golden Origin Cauldron, the Byzantium Helios Beast, and his Otherworldly Demon puppets, let alone, tame them.

Furthermore, if too many of them were gathered together, they would try to at least put on a show of bravado of some kind before their comrades, or else it would be too embarrassing for them to face one another in the future.

If that was the case, that could complicate the taming process.

Dealing with them one by one was much easier and simpler.

“Alright, but...” With his soul held hostage in Zhang Xuan’s hands, the Scarlet Blaze Lion couldn’t disobey him. However, he raised his face and said, “... in my current state, I fear that they won’t believe my words...”

The Golden Origin Cauldron had gotten too excited earlier, so it had accidentally gone overboard, causing the Scarlet Blaze Lion to look nothing like its originally majestic and dashing self.

“Drink the contents of this gourd!” Zhang Xuan infused a few surges of Heaven’s Path zhenqi into a gourd of Earth Vein Spirit Essence before passing it over.

Due to the other party’s massive physique and higher cultivation, it would require at least a dozen gourds of wine for the Scarlet Blaze Lion to make a complete recovery.

Even if the other party wasn’t drunk by then, the others might still notice that something was amiss from the strong scent of alcohol on him.

On the other hand, by mixing the Earth Vein Spirit Essence with his Heaven’s Path zhenqi, the restorative effect of the Heaven’s Path zhenqi would be amplified, so a single gourd would suffice.

Taking the gourd, the Scarlet Blaze Lion uncorked the cap, and with a single sniff, it suddenly felt the urge to keel over.

“This is... the Earth Vein Spirit Essence?”

He had finally found the fellow who had stolen their treasure...

But who would have thought that the thief would end up becoming his master?

What was with this turn of events?

It was just that morning that he had been hurling curses at the thief alongside the other kings, swearing to tear the other party into shreds... But a few hours later, here he was, kneeling before the other party respectfully...

Ahhh, the wretched tragedies of a beast life...

But as stifled as he felt within, the Scarlet Blaze Lion drank the spirit essence in the gourd in a single gulp.

As the spiritual energy coursed through his body, the severe injuries he had sustained before swiftly healed.

“T-this...” The Scarlet Blaze Lion blinked in confusion, completely dumbfounded.

He was familiar with the properties of the Earth Vein Spirit Essence. Even at the very most, it should only have replenished his strength. When did it gain healing properties as well?

“I have added some medicinal herbs inside to give it the ability to heal injuries swiftly. As long as you serve me well, it isn’t too difficult for me to raise your cultivation to Spiritual Perception realm!” Zhang Xuan said.

“Yes!” The Scarlet Blaze Lion nodded in agitation.

It could be said to be a miraculous feat to grant the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, a substance formed solely out of spiritual energy, healing properties.

If his master had such means, perhaps he might really be able to help raise his cultivation to Spiritual Perception realm!

“Alright, you may go now!” Zhang Xuan said with a wave of his hand.

Having tamed the Scarlet Blaze Lion, he could control the other party’s life and death with a single thought, so he wasn’t worried about the other party turning against him.

“Master...”

Watching as the Scarlet Blaze Lion returned to the cavern, the Byzantium Helios Beast walked up to Zhang Xuan with admiration gleaming in his eyes.

The Cloudmist Ridge had always been a lurking threat to the Master Teacher Academy. Even the old principal had been helpless before it, but Zhang Xuan... As soon as he arrived, he had already tamed all of the Half-Saint and Nascent Saint

beasts in the area. Now, he had even tamed one of the Ten Indomitable Kings, and it seemed like his streak was still going to continue...

It might not be long before the entire Cloudmist Ridge became a vassal of the Master Teacher Academy...

Zhang Xuan thought that the Byzantium Helios Beast was worried, so he reassured with a smile. "We might not be a match for them now, but with an additional member of the Ten Indomitable Kings tamed, the odds will lean further in our favor. By then, we should be able to achieve an easy victory!"

From the moment he arrived on the battlefield, he had already come up with this plan. Naturally, it was also with such intentions in mind that he had asked School Head Mo to propose a negotiation with the other party.

This was the only way that he would be able to slip into the Cloudmist Ridge to carry out his plan.

The Ten Indomitable Kings were a formidable force when they were gathered together, and not even he was able to do anything about them. However, by luring them out one by one, as long as he could tame four of them, with their force along with the Byzantium Helios Beast, the Golden Origin Cauldron, and the Otherworldly Demon puppets... the remaining members would surely fall to him as well!

...

In the cavern, School Head Mo was still oblivious to Zhang Xuan's intentions. He stared at the entrance of the cavern worriedly with clenched fists, fearing that the next being to enter would deliver bad news.

Hu!

A figure appeared in his sight as the Crimson Blaze Lion rushed into the cavern.

Seeing the Crimson Blaze Lion return to the cavern without anyone with him, the Golden Beartiger Beast frowned in displeasure. "What happened? Where are the Black Spirit Panthers and that lad?"

He had ordered the Crimson Blaze Lion to find that fellow, so why had he returned alone?

The Scarlet Blaze Lion harrumphed in displeasure. “That fellow is more cunning than I thought. He managed to distract the Black Spirit Panthers for a moment and slipped away. I tried to look around the area, but I wasn’t able to determine which direction he escaped in. Steelbacked Bear and Emerald Bamboo Earth Dragon, follow me to take a look!”

“That fellow escaped?”

“Hahaha! School Head Mo, so that is your student? Abandoning his teacher in the face of danger to escape?”

“The Master Teacher Academy sure has fallen!”

Hearing that the lad had abandoned his teacher and escaped, the other kings burst into laughter.

It was said that the master teachers valued their lineage. But while the teacher was negotiating here, the student actually escaped as soon as he found the opportunity to do so. Disgraceful!

School Head Mo was dumbstruck as well. Principal Zhang escaped?

He could hardly believe those words, but... the Scarlet Blaze Lion shouldn’t have any reason to lie about that!

“Sure, I will go with you to take a look. I sure didn’t expect the Master Teacher Academy to have such a student in their ranks!” The Steelbacked Bear stood up as he laughed uproariously.

“Hahaha, count me in as well!” The Emerald Bamboo Earth Dragon rose from its seat as well.

Just like the Scarlet Blaze Lion, these two fellows were Saint 1-dan pinnacle beasts as well. Their presence felt like an endless abyss, leaving one incapable of gauging how powerful they were.

“Find him quickly; we don’t have much time to spare!” the Golden Beartiger Beast said with a frown.

“Don’t worry!” The Scarlet Blaze Lion chuckled before bringing the two saint beasts out.

After the three saint beasts left, the Golden Beartiger Beast turned to School Head Mo and sneered coldly, “School Head Mo, what else do you have to say? Even your own direct disciple behaves so dishonorably... Tell me, where do you find the confidence to preach about morals and values to others?”

Only a person of upstanding character can win the respect of others. Despite being one of the esteemed Ten Great Master Teachers, his direct disciple turned out to be a reprehensible scoundrel who cared only about his own safety in the face of danger. If others were to learn of this, School Head Mo could very well die of shame!

“I...” School Head Mo clenched his fists tightly.

Even though he didn’t think that Principal Zhang would actually abandon him, he still couldn’t help but feel apprehensive.

The other party was the one who had proposed the negotiation, but two hours had passed, and the other party’s figure was nowhere to be seen. Even up to this point, he still had no idea what was going on; he felt helpless and frustrated.

“Hehe, there’s no doubt about it. That student of School Head Mo must have been scared out of his wits when he saw our great army of aerial spirit beasts, and knowing that their defeat was imminent, he decided to flee in advance!”

“I have always thought that master teachers are people with backbones, but this incident has truly opened my eyes. To think that they could stoop even lower than our Beast Tribe...”

The kings burst into laughter.

“School Head Mo, there is no need to stall for time any longer. Both you and I know that it is futile. Hurry up and contact the other school heads and have them agree to our terms. Otherwise, you won’t be getting out of here alive!” the Golden Beartiger Beast said with a menacing edge to his voice.

“I...” Sighing deeply, School Head Mo was just about to speak when footsteps sounded outside the cavern once more. Turning his gaze over, the Steelbacked Bear, who had left just a moment ago, had returned.

“There is something really eerie about that fellow! I have no idea where he found those experts from, but even with the three of us combined, we aren’t able to defeat his reinforcements. Tigerhead Beast and Steelfang Wolf, follow me. We shall crush him together!”

“He found experts to reinforce him?”

“What kind of experts did he bring in for the three of you to be unable to defeat them?”

The Tigerhead Beast and Steelfang Wolf both questioned him with a deep frown as they got up from their seats.

“I am not too sure either, but they don’t seem like elders from the Master Teacher Academy. Let’s talk on the way, I fear that the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the Emerald Bamboo Earth Dragon can’t hold on for much longer!” the Steelbacked Bear urged.

“Alright then.”

The two kings of the Cloudmist Ridge stood up, and after bowing to the Golden Beartiger Beast, they hurriedly followed the Steelbacked Bear out.

A few moments later, the Steelfang Wolf returned and exclaimed, “He seems to have brought in even more reinforcements! Bluetrunk Elephant, Crimsonflame Ape, Steelscale Beast, and White-eared Beast, follow me!”

Just who did Principal Zhang bring in here? School Head Mo was confused by the situation before him.

“This...”

Looking around him, the Golden Beartiger Beast suddenly realized, to his surprise, that he was the only remaining member of the Ten Indomitable Kings in the cavern.

882 Tribute

Every single one of the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge had strength rivaling the Ten Great Master Teachers of the Master Teacher Academy!

Just what kind of reinforcements did School Head Mo's student bring in to require the strength of nine of them?

Did he bring the other elders into the Cloudmist Ridge?

But that didn't make sense either! If so many enemies had invaded the heart of their base, the Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts patrolling the area should have already reported the matter to him!

With eyes narrowed threateningly, the Golden Beartiger Beast glared at School Head Mo. "Mo Zhu, just what in the world are you up to?"

"I don't know either. I have been here all along..." School Head Mo was on the verge of bursting into tears.

It was as if he was here to serve as a sidekick to the principal; he had no idea what the other party was up to...

Unsure of whether School Head Mo was putting on an act or not, the Golden Beartiger Beast threatened him once more. "You don't know? You'd better not be trying to pull something. For my Cloudmist Ridge to survive right under the nose of the Master Teacher Academy for so long, it definitely isn't as simple as you might think..."

"You have your men scattered throughout Cloudmist Ridge. Even if we do attempt to pull something, how can you possibly not know?" School Head Mo argued.

Hearing those words, the Golden Beartiger Beast glared at School Head Mo for a moment before eventually nodding slightly in agreement

This was exactly what had left him puzzled.

If something had truly happened, the other kings would have surely informed him. For them to call for the other kings to go with them instead, that meant that the problem was still within their means to deal with.

Forget it. As long as School Head Mo remains my hostage, the Master Teacher Academy won't be able to take any drastic actions. As long as I have this card, I should be able to force them into compromising! The Golden Beartiger Beast reassessed his current situation, and feeling that he was still in a safe position, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Standing up, he was just about to force School Head Mo into accepting his terms once more when the Scarlet Flame Lion, the first king to leave, finally returned to the cavern.

Following behind him was the Steelbacked Bear, Tigerhead Beast, Steelfang Wolf... All nine of the kings had returned together, and sandwiched between them was a young man with a lowered head.

He was School Head Mo's escaped student.

The Scarlet Blaze Lion stepped forward and reported loudly, "Boss, we have managed to bring back this fellow!"

"What happened that required all of you to head out?" the Golden Beartiger Beast asked doubtfully.

"It's like this..."

The Tigerhead Beast stepped forward, pointed its steel claws at Zhang Xuan ferociously, and harrumphed. "I don't know how that fellow did it, but he managed to find a few formidable master teachers to reinforce him, so we ended up fighting against them..."

"Master teachers?" The Golden Beartiger Beast frowned.

The Steelfang Wolf stepped forward and said in agreement, "That's right!"

"Who are those master teachers? Are they the Ten Great Master Teachers of the Master Teacher Academy?" the Golden Beartiger Beast continued asking.

“That doesn’t seem to be the case. None of them look familiar to us... Why don’t I take out their corpses to show you? Here they...” the Steelbacked Bear said as he walked toward the Golden Beartiger Beast

At this point, the Steelbacked Bear was only three meters away from the Golden Beartiger Beast.

Without finishing his words, he abruptly leaped forward with three other saint beasts to assault the Golden Beartiger Beast.

Hong long!

The Scarlet Blaze Lion, Tigerhead Beast, Steelfang Wolf, and Steelbacked Bear were considered the strongest saint beasts in Cloudmist Ridge after the Golden Beartiger Beast. Their combined might was so great that it felt like it could split mountains and reverse rivers.

Before the Golden Beartiger Beast could react, he was already struck squarely by four paws and claws.

Peng!

“What are you all doing!” the Golden Beartiger bellowed furiously as his figure was sent retreating into the distance. It knocked through a couple of stalactites before eventually crashing into the wall of the cavern, and it spewed large mouthfuls of blood.

The other saint beasts had been together with him for over a thousand years, and he deeply trusted them. He never thought that they would suddenly make such a vicious move against him!

In just a moment, the Golden Beartiger Beast had already sustained severe injuries. His innards were so shaken by the impact that it would be difficult for him to recover in the short term.

Panting heavily, the Golden Beartiger Beast felt most of his strength sapping away from his body. With reddened eyes, he roared frenziedly, “Why? Tell me why!”

“Master!”

Ignoring the roars of the Golden Beartiger Beast, the Scarlet Blaze Lion, Steelbacked Bear, Steelfang Wolf, and Tigerhead Beast, having accomplished their mission, turned around and bowed to Zhang Xuan.

“Un.” Chuckling softly, Zhang Xuan placed his hands behind his back and raised his head, revealing a faint smile on his lips. As he stepped forward with an entourage of saint beasts following behind him, it seemed as if he was a lofty emperor.

“Of the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge, nine have already submitted to me. Golden Beartiger Beast, you have two choices before you; you can either submit to me, or prepare to die!”

“They have submitted to you?” The Golden Beartiger Beast widened its eyes as it glanced at the other nine kings in disbelief.

They were all proud saint beasts, how could they submit to a mere human... and not to mention, an insignificant Chrysalis realm cultivator?

He wasn't the only one who was feeling frenzied by the situation; School Head Mo also felt like he was losing his mind.

He had thought that Principal Zhang was truly here to negotiate, and he had resigned himself to be cursed for this failure for generations to come. Who would have thought that the other party, in just a little more than two hours, would manage to tame nine of the Ten Indomitable Kings?

Furthermore, recalling how there was not a single beast who had come in to report the matter, the chances were that the Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts had become his tamed beasts as well...

He knew that the new principal was extremely skilled at beast taming, having witnessed it back in the entrance examination on Leyuan Peak, but this... this power level was way off charts, way too overpowered!

If the other party were to continue taming beasts at this rate, would all of the saint beasts in the Master Teacher Continent

become his tamed beasts and obey his commands?

While School Head Mo was in a daze, the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the others turned to their former boss, the strongest saint beast of the Cloudmist Ridge, and attempted to persuade him.

“Boss, you should just submit to him. Our master is a person of great capability. We will definitely achieve greater heights pursuing him!”

“Indeed. For many years, we have successfully repelled all enemies, including the forces of the Master Teacher Academy, and maintained a tight grip over the Cloudmist Ridge. But think about it, how different is this from being trapped in a cage? In any case, I have had enough!”

“There is no point resisting it; you will be killed if you hesitate any longer!”

...

“You want me to submit? Dream on!”

Seeing that all of his subordinates had betrayed him, the Golden Beartiger Beast shouted savagely, “Weren’t you all curious about why such a huge supply of Earth Vein Spirit Essence has accumulated here, never running out despite so many spirit beasts and saint beasts absorbing it over the years? Let me tell you the reason today!”

With a furious roar, the Golden Beartiger Beast struggled to his feet and leaped into the dried-up lake before speaking in a respectful tone. “My great emperor, please grant me the power to eliminate these traitors of the Beast Tribe...”

This time, he was speaking not in the human language but the Ancient Beast Language.

“Emperor?”

Hearing those words, Zhang Xuan frowned as an ominous premonition clutched his heart.

From the very start, he had been wondering how something as rare as the Earth Vein Spirit Essence could gather in such great quantity in the Cloudmist Ridge. Even considering the unique geographical terrain, it was near impossible for that to happen.

And more importantly, it was unnatural for there to be so many saint beasts gathered here.

Survival of the fittest. Resources were always in short supply, so the number of experts in a region was limited.

It was truly confounding to see so many powerful beasts gathering on this land.

At the same time, School Head Mo's face also warped in astonishment.

As a 6-star pinnacle beast tamer, even though he wasn't very fluent in the Ancient Beast Language, he was still able to decipher bits and pieces of the Golden Beartiger Beast's words. It was apparent that the other party was trying to initiate some kind of ritual to summon a powerful being.

If the other party succeeded, the tables could very well be turned on them.

"Zhang shi..." Anxious, School Head Mo immediately turned to Zhang Xuan.

Zhang Xuan raised his hand and said, "Calm down, let's just watch for now. This could very well concern the mystery behind the disappearance of Elder Wu Yangzi..."

After taming the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the others, he had questioned them about the matter concerning Wu Yangzi's disappearance two thousand years ago. However, they had only risen to power a thousand years ago, so they weren't too sure about that incident either.

However, based on their description, it seemed like the Golden Beartiger Beast was the key to this mystery.

This was precisely why he possessed unparalleled authority in the Cloudmist Ridge, the number one figure of the innumerable beasts gathered here.

Hong long long!

Extremely highly concentrated spiritual energy abruptly burst forth from the depths of the cavern. In that moment, it felt as if the sky was falling, and it left all present incapable of catching their breath.

The lake that had stored the Earth Vein Spirit Essence previously seemed to have become an altar for the Golden Beartiger Beast to make an offering in order to summon an overwhelmingly powerful being here.

“What power...”

Feeling the powerful energy drifting in the air, School Head Mo’s face paled. He couldn’t help but retreat several steps as he clenched his jaws in pain.

The pressure was simply too great, and it seemed to be crushing his soul directly. Despite being a Saint 1-dan pinnacle expert, he still found himself unable to hold on for much longer.

“Zhang shi...”

If even someone of his prowess was unable to withstand this pressure, what would become of their principal?

Alarmed, he quickly turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan, only to see the latter standing upright with his eyes gazing coldly upon the lake, as if he couldn’t feel the pressure at all.

School Head Mo’s body jolted in astonishment.

Even the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the other kings of the Cloudmist Ridge were lying feebly on the ground under that immense pressure, so how was it possible for their principal to be completely fine?

Hong long long!

Before he could analyze what was going on, the spiritual energy in the air suddenly gathered to form an illusory, mist-like Bluehorn Dragon Beast. Coiling in the air, its very presence seemed to exert immense pressure directly on one’s soul.

“My descendant, why have you summoned me?” A majestic voice boomed.

The Bluehorn Dragon Beast spoke in the Ancient Beast Language as well, but its words felt heavy, seemingly carrying a quality that left one feeling as if one had traveled back in time.

This is... the most authentic Ancient Beast Language! School Head Mo's body turned cold.

It was possible for them to emulate the pronunciation of the Ancient Beast Language, but it was impossible to bring out the same deep resonance as the ancient beasts of old.

Just this intonation in itself could bring one the loyalty of many spirit beasts and saint beasts. Without a doubt, this Bluehorn Dragon Beast was a legendary figure from the ancient era.

Turning around, he saw the Scarlet Blaze Lion, Tigerhead Beast, and the others trembling in fear, unable to bring forth the slightest intention to retaliate at all.

This was a result of the inevitable suppression of bloodline among saint beasts

Turning his gaze back to Principal Zhang, he was just thinking about how he could shield the other party and send him out safely, when he saw the latter standing before the Bluehorn Dragon Beast with a frown, seemingly in deep thought.

The Golden Beartiger Beast kneeled to the ground and pleaded using the Ancient Beast Language, "My emperor, I ask of you to grant me the power to eliminate these traitors!"

"What can you offer me?" the illusory figure above asked impassively.

"I can offer you the fresh blood of this 6-star pinnacle master teacher of the Master Teacher Academy, the head of the Beast Tamer School!" the Golden Beartiger Beast replied respectfully.

"A 6-star pinnacle master teacher?" The figure above shook his head and replied, "That is not enough!"

The Golden Beartiger Beast pointed to Zhang Xuan and said, "And his student as well!"

However, thinking that it was unlikely to suffice as well, he added, "With my newfound power, I will immediately dispatch my army to slaughter more master teachers to offer them to you!"

“Granted. You should know the consequences if you renege on your promise.”

Hong long!

With the words of the illusory figure above, overwhelming strength abruptly fell and surged into the body of the Golden Beartiger Beast, and its withered aura began to recover.

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School Head Mo's face blanched. "Zhang shi, you must leave right now! The Golden Beartiger Beast is having his strength forcefully raised, and he will gain great power in the short term. If you don't leave right now, you will be in danger..."

Despite the severe side effects afterward, such forceful infusion of energy could heal the Golden Beartiger Beast's wounds and even bring his cultivation up another level. Once this infusion was complete, none of those present would be a match for him!

Before School Head Mo could even finish his words, the Golden Beartiger Beast's strength already recovered to Saint realm 1-dan, and with incredible momentum, he achieved a breakthrough and reached Spiritual Perception realm shortly afterward.

Spiritual Perception realm primary stage, intermediate stage, advanced stage...

His cultivation sped forward at an unbelievable pace.

Faced with such a sight, those kings who had pledged loyalty to Zhang Xuan earlier began trembling in fright.

Over the years, they had learned that the Golden Beartiger Beast was hiding some powerful means up his sleeves, but they didn't think that it would be so fearsome!

If they had known that the Golden Beartiger Beast was capable of this, they never would have dared to betray him! Having pledged allegiance to the wrong faction, they were all doomed to die now.

Kacha!

With another loud buzz, the Golden Beartiger Beast's cultivation achieved another breakthrough, reaching Saint realm 3-dan before gradually coming to a halt.

“Remember your promise!” the illusory figure warned sharply before gradually dissipating into nothingness.

“Hahaha, you must not have seen this coming when you betrayed me. Today, you all shall learn the consequence of turning your back on me!”

Feeling the magnificent power coursing through his body, the Golden Beartiger Beast swiped his paw down with a roar, sealing the entrance to the cavern. No one could escape anymore.

He had always been the emperor of the Cloudmist Ridge, and no one had dared to disobey his orders before. Yet, in a single day, not only had he found his subordinates betraying him all at once, he had even been severely injured by them. The rage that he felt within was enough to drive him mad.

Hong long long!

As the might of a Saint realm 3-dan expert permeated the area, the entire cavern began creaking under the pressure, seemingly on the verge of collapse.

“Master...”

In the face of the Golden Beartiger Beast’s absolute strength, the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the others trembled in fear, and with pale faces, they turned to Zhang Xuan, hoping to find a chance of survival.

At Saint realm 3-dan, Embryonic Soul realm, one’s dantian would be forged into an Origin Soul, amplifying the power one could wield many times over. Even if the nine of them were to gather their strength to fight against him, they still wouldn’t be a match at all!

If a battle were to truly occur, it wouldn’t be long before they breathed their last.

At this moment, they could only bank their hopes on the master they had acknowledged just a while ago and pray that he would be able to create a miracle once more.

“Mo Zhu, I gave you a chance earlier, but you refused to budge. It’s too late now. Not only will you die, Hongyuan City

and the Master Teacher Academy will pay the price for your foolishness as well! They shall be devastated by the army of aerial spirit beasts, and history will remember you as the sinner who caused it all!” the Golden Beartiger Beast roared savagely.

Hong long!

With a deafening cry, the Golden Beartiger Beast charged at School Head Mo. The Golden Beartiger Beast raised his paws, and a massive palm print appeared in the air and fell violently upon the latter.

“Thirteen Swords of the Red Leaf!”

Without any hesitation, School Head Mo drew his sword once more and utilized his strongest technique to retaliate.

As soon as the sword came into contact with the red leaf, the red leaf after-shadows immediately dissipated, and with a loud ‘kacha!’, the sword snapped into innumerable pieces and scattered all over the ground.

Pu!

School Head Mo was sent flying before knocking onto the wall of the cavern. Blood spewed out of his mouth frenziedly, and his face turned as pale as a sheet of paper.

When he’d used that same sword art earlier, he had at least been able to force the Golden Beartiger Beast back by a single step. However, after the other party’s surge in strength, he couldn’t even stop a casual blow from the beast.

The disparity in their strength was truly despairing.

Even if Senior Byzantium Helios and Senior Golden Origin Cauldron were to collaborate against him, they still wouldn’t be a match for him.

“Zhang shi, hurry up and leave,” School Head Mo urged anxiously.

It wouldn’t matter if he were to die here, but nothing could be allowed to happen to the principal!

Otherwise, the division within the academy would never be breached, and it would fall into chaos once more.

The Golden Beartiger Beast turned to Zhang Xuan and sneered, “Leave? Hahaha, after inducing so many of my subordinates to betray me, do you think that I will allow you to leave?”

Leaping forward, the Golden Beartiger Beast raised his paw and struck down forcefully.

“Be careful!” School Head Mo exclaimed anxiously.

Even he was unable to stand against the assault of the Golden Beartiger Beast, let alone the Transcendent Mortal 9-dan Principal Zhang!

Enduring the severe wounds he was afflicted with, School Head Mo hurriedly got to his feet to rush forward and take the blow for Zhang Xuan, but before he could move, an immense pressure abruptly crushed down on his body, nearly shattering it.

The enemy was simply too powerful. Just his aura was already sufficient to render him nearly powerless.

“No need to get hasty, you will be next! No one will be getting away today!” Sneering coldly, the Golden Beartiger Beast pushed his palm down toward Zhang Xuan, and ‘jiya!’, the ground creaked loudly under the pressure of the palm.

“Zhang shi!” School Head Mo exclaimed in despair.

He had never thought that it would eventually end like this. If he had known, he never would have agreed to let Zhang Xuan come with him.

“Getting away? Who says that I intend to escape?”

Just when everyone thought that Zhang Xuan would surely die, a nonchalant voice suddenly sounded in the air. Following which, an overwhelming killing intent suddenly burst forth from behind Zhang shi and swept through everything in its path like a hurricane.

Hong long!

Under the burst of killing intent, the offense against Zhang Xuan was neutralized, and before the arrogant Golden Beartiger Beast could realize what was going on, his head suddenly bent backward, and his tongue fell out from his mouth as he plummeted from the sky, crashing head first to the ground. A massive depression appeared in his wake.

“Ding Ding, destroy him!” Zhang Xuan instructed.

The Golden Origin Cauldron immediately charged forward to slam into the Golden Beartiger Beast.

Peng!

As the duo collided, a resounding chime reminiscent of a bell echoed, and a spurt of blood mixed with a few teeth spewed out of the Golden Beartiger Beast’s mouth.

The situation he suddenly found himself faced with left him dumbfounded.

He had thought that after reaching Saint 3-dan with the infusion of power from his emperor, he would be able to slaughter everyone present and shake the Master Teacher Academy to the core. Who could have known that, before he could even display the full extent of his prowess, he would be abruptly knocked out of the sky by an aura that jolted his soul?

Furthermore...

What was with the sudden appearance of this Saint-tier artifact?

He might possess greater strength than the other party, but Saint-tier artifacts, especially a cauldron like the one before him, were known to possess nigh invincible defense; how was he supposed to defeat the other party?

Peng!

Just as the Golden Beartiger Beast was overwhelmed by the turn of events, the Golden Origin Cauldron suddenly charged over with a roar and smashed into his head once more.

A deafening blast reminiscent of the heaven and earth collapsing sounded, and the sight before the Golden Beartiger Beast abruptly turned dark. His massive body tumbled

backward with astounding momentum, leaving a deep gorge in his path. By the time he knocked into the cavern wall, his body was already cloaked in a layer of dust and bits of granite.

“This...”

“Even the powered up Golden Beartiger Beast... is no match for the Saint-tier artifact?”

The Scarlet Blaze Lion, Tigerhead Beast, and the other kings gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

From the looks of it, it seemed like the Golden Origin Cauldron had truly gone easy on them back when they had fought with it.

Otherwise, with just a body slam, their bodies might have been crushed to bits.

Those saint beasts who had just regretted pledging allegiance to Zhang Xuan couldn't help but shudder in astonishment. It was fortunate that they hadn't said it out loud, or they might just have been the next ones to follow the Golden Beartiger Beast.

“Hahaha, this is truly exhilarating! It has been a long time since I was last able to fight like that. Little beast, just watch how Grandpa Ding turns you into cinders today!” the Golden Origin Cauldron yelled excitedly as it slammed into the dying Golden Beartiger Beast again and again.

The might of the Golden Origin Cauldron was so great that ordinary Saint realm experts couldn't hope to withstand it. Only against this fellow would it be able to use its full strength.

“This...” School Head Mo felt his head spinning as he stared at the sight with slackened jaws.

He had thought that they would all lose their lives, but... this reversal had come far too quickly!

The Golden Origin Cauldron was powerful—there was no doubt about that—but ultimately, it was only a Saint-tier artifact. Without anyone wielding it, it was difficult to bring out the full extent of its power. Thus, School Head Mo didn't

think that it would be able to defeat the Golden Beartiger Beast.

What had truly reversed the tides of the battle was the fearsome killing intent that had burst forth from behind Zhang shi earlier!

Where did it come from?

Had the Golden Origin Cauldron charged forth without that killing intent incapacitating the Golden Beartiger Beast beforehand, it would have surely been knocked back, and a one-sided pummeling wouldn't be happening now either.

School Head Mo swiftly turned his gaze to Principal Zhang, only to see the latter with a nonchalant expression on his face. It was as if he knew that this matter would end in such a manner, and there was not the slightest trace of surprise or fear on his face.

And in truth, this matter was truly nothing to Zhang Xuan at all.

The Golden Beartiger Beast had gained massive power from the emperor he spoke of, reaching Saint realm 3-dan, but Zhang Xuan's trump cards didn't consist of just the Byzantium Helios Beast and the Golden Origin Cauldron. There was the even more powerful Vicious as well.

After consuming a third of Kong shi's writings on the scroll, he had grown significantly more powerful than before. Putting aside a mere Saint realm 3-dan primary stage cultivator, a surge of his zhenqi could easily knock down even a Saint realm 4-dan expert from the sky and incapacitate him.

Before a mere Golden Beartiger Beast, he wouldn't even bat an eyelid!

Peng peng peng peng!

The Golden Origin Cauldron continued to ram itself into the Golden Beartiger Beast, and before long, he was already bruised all over. His breathing was so faint that it seemed as if he would just pass away at any moment.

“Alright, that’s enough!” Seeing the Golden Origin Cauldron getting more and more excited from the battle, Zhang Xuan hurriedly stood forward to stop it.

“Master, he tried to kill you earlier! Let me pummel him to death to show him the consequences of baring his fangs at you...” The Golden Origin Cauldron was reluctant to stop in the midst of his fun.

It wasn’t easy for it to find someone who was so tolerant to its beating, so it should at least have its fair share of fun with him.

“Leave him alive for now, I have some things to ask him,” said Zhang Xuan.

There were still many mysteries surrounding this matter, such as the emperor whom the other party had summoned earlier and the various bizarre happenings on Cloudmist Ridge.

If the Golden Beartiger Beast was killed, they would lose a valuable source of information.

Hearing those words, the Golden Origin Cauldron could only stop with a regretful look on its face.

Zhang Xuan walked up to the Golden Beartiger Beast, and upon taking a closer look at its current state, his lips couldn’t help but twitch.

It must be said that the Golden Origin Cauldron really hadn’t held back. It had rammed its body at the Golden Beartiger Beast’s head forcefully, again and again, knocking away every hint of the other party’s former glory as a king of the Cloudmist Ridge.

As a result, the other party’s massive head was filled with creases, similar to those of a shriveled meat bun.

If he hadn’t stopped the Golden Origin Cauldron in time, the other party would definitely have lost his life!

Flicking his wrist, Zhang Xuan took out a bit of Earth Vein Spirit Essence and fed it to the Golden Beartiger Beast, restoring a little bit of his vitality. Afterward, he gazed down at the other party coldly and said, “Submit to me, or die!”

As long as the other party submitted to him, he should be able to acquire all of the intelligence he needed. Otherwise, even if he were to force the other party to speak, there was no way of telling whether the information acquired was credible or not.

“You want me to submit to you? Dream on! My life belongs to my emperor, and if you dare to kill me, my emperor will surely exact vengeance for me!” the Golden Beartiger Beast roared furiously.

“Your emperor? Hah, you expect an incomplete soul to exact vengeance for you?” Zhang Xuan sneered.

Zhang Xuan had assessed the ‘emperor’ that the Golden Beartiger Beast spoke of with his Eye of Insight when it was summoned earlier, and he was certain that it was only a soul.

The reason the soul was able to raise the Golden Beartiger Beast’s cultivation so swiftly was probably due to some kind of secret art it possessed.

So far, Zhang Xuan only had the cultivation techniques for soul oracles from Transcendent Mortal 1-dan to 9-dan.

On the other hand, considering how the ‘emperor’ was able to raise the Golden Beartiger Beast’s cultivation to Saint realm 3-dan in just a short period of time, it should at least be at Saint realm 4-dan or 5-dan.

Considering its strength, even if it was a mere incomplete soul now, it would still be extremely beneficial to Zhang Xuan if he could capture it.

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“An incomplete soul? My emperor is a deity, a saint beast from an ancient era. For you to have plotted against the Cloudmist Ridge, you have already infringed on his authority. There is no doubt that he will extract your soul and tear your body into pieces to exact vengeance for me,” the Golden Beartiger Beast howled in rage.

It seemed that he was extremely loyal to the so-called emperor, revering the other party even.

He had already placed the other party on a divine pedestal in his mind, so he couldn't bring himself to believe that the other party would only be a mere soul.

On the other hand, Zhang Xuan shook his head.

If the so-called emperor was truly that powerful, it wouldn't have been stuck on the Cloudmist Ridge, dependent on the Golden Beartiger Beast's tributes.

“If the emperor you spoke of is as incredible as you say, don't you think that it would have appeared after seeing the state you are in?” Zhang Xuan replied with a wry smile.

“My emperor will never abandon me. You will be regretting your actions against me very soon,” the Golden Beartiger Beast yowled frenziedly.

But despite the words it spoke, uncertainty had already crept into his gaze. His confidence had wavered.

He knew that his relationship with his emperor was one built on mutual profit. He would offer tributes to the latter, and the latter would grant him power or the Earth Vein Spirit Essence.

Even if he was pummeled to death, all his emperor had to do was find another agent to work for him instead. There was no need for the other party to save him, or rather, if the other party had any intentions of saving him, the other party wouldn't have watched as the massive cauldron pummeled him viciously.

Noticing the hint of apprehension in the depths of the Golden Beartiger Beast's eyes, Zhang Xuan knew that his words had worked. Thus, infusing his words with the Impartation of Heaven's Will, he said, "I heard earlier that you were going to offer School Head Mo and me to your emperor. Is this what you have done with the many master teachers before us?"

Earlier, when the Golden Beartiger Beast negotiated with his emperor and offered the lives of School Head Mo, Zhang Xuan, and countless other master teachers as tribute, the latter had agreed immediately. The deal had gone so smoothly that it felt like they had conducted the same trade innumerable times over the years, and they had already come to a mutual understanding of the needs of each other.

Furthermore, recalling the many corpses he had seen in the surroundings, it wasn't too difficult to put the story together.

Considering the huge implications of this matter, the Golden Beartiger Beast couldn't possibly allow the other saint beasts to learn of this matter as well, so he had to get the information out of the beast in question.

Perhaps, the full mystery might be unraveled with this.

"Nonsense..."

The Golden Beartiger Beast immediately shook his head. However, halfway through his words, the figure of the young man before him suddenly seemed to tower above him, reminiscent of an inviolable deity of the heavens. He desired deeply to deny the matter, but his mind wouldn't listen to him. Unable to control himself, he began confessing, "That's right! My emperor would devour the blood and flesh of those master teachers, and in exchange for that, he would bestow us with the Earth Vein Spirit Essence, granting us an opportunity to achieve a breakthrough in our cultivation!"

Previously, Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will had only been effective on those who had the blood of a human running through their veins, which resulted in it being ineffective against beasts. However, after comprehending the Heart of a Teacher, the effects of his Impartation of Heaven's Will had been extended to beasts as well, allowing him to

beguile even a saint beast like the Golden Beartiger Beast easily.

“Devour the blood and flesh of master teachers?” School Head Mo clenched his trembling fists in agitation.

He had thought that the saint beasts were just an impending threat that the Master Teacher Academy would have to deal with soon, but who would have thought that they had been committing such atrocities over the years?

If he had learned of this earlier, he would surely have convinced the Master Teacher Academy to send an army up to utterly destroy the Cloudmist Ridge long ago.

If this had been going on over a span of more than a thousand years, he could hardly imagine how many master teachers had died brutally due to the other party.

Zhang Xuan’s complexion had darkened as well, but he continued to interrogate the other party. “Are those white bones in the cavern the corpses of the deceased master teachers?”

“That’s right! They are the master teachers who dared to brazenly barge into my Cloudmist Ridge over the years. I offered their blood and flesh to my emperor, and all that is left of them is the pile of bones here. In exchange, my emperor has used his divine strength to alter the geography of the Cloudmist Ridge, turning it into a natural formation to gather Earth Vein Spirit Essence. It is precisely this that has allowed the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge to grow rapidly stronger over the years!” the Golden Beartiger Beast explained proudly.

He dared not kill master teachers openly, but each year, there were still a substantial number of master teachers who went missing due to undertaking dangerous missions or various miscellaneous reasons each year. As such, he was still able to tribute dozens or even several hundred master teachers each year without drawing much attention.

Suppressing his fury, Zhang Xuan continued asking, “Since your emperor is consuming the blood and flesh of master teachers, it is surely not an ordinary soul. Where is he now?”

For a soul to live, it had to be nourished by a body. Otherwise, it would be extremely vulnerable to the Five Soul Declines, resulting in it getting weaker and weaker over time.

The main reason Mo Hunsheng was able to survive several ten thousand years was due to the unique nature of the Nine Skies Lotus Embryo. If not for that God artifact, his soul would have long dissipated as well.

To be able to survive the ancient era and feed on the blood and flesh of master teachers, the so-called emperor was definitely not an ordinary soul.

“That... I am not too sure where my emperor is either. I only know that he only appears if I summon him here,” the Golden Beartiger Beast replied.

“Summon him here?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Activating the Eye of Insight, he began scanning the surroundings.

The previous time he was here, he had taken a look as well, and he hadn't noticed anything at all.

But if the so-called emperor would only appear when summoned here, the chances were that there was something amiss here...

Even through the Eye of Insight, Zhang Xuan only saw an ordinary cavern. There didn't seem to be anything out of place in the surroundings.

Wait. That fellow appeared here not long ago, so perhaps I might be able to trace his aura... Suddenly recalling this matter, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Due to the intangible and elusive nature of souls, it was extremely difficult to find the trail of a soul. However, as one who possessed the Eye of Insight, he should still be able to find some traces if he looked closely.

Focusing his sight on the area where the so-called emperor had appeared earlier, lines of insight began gathering in Zhang Xuan's eyes, and finally, an extremely faint trail could be seen leading into the depths of the cavern.

“Ding Ding, I will leave this fellow to you!”

Having finished his interrogation and uncovered the trail to his next target, Zhang Xuan issued his instructions to the Golden Origin Cauldron before taking huge strides into the depths of the cavern.

The Golden Beartiger Beast had the blood of far too many master teachers on his hands. That was beyond Zhang Xuan’s bottom line, and he had no intention of sparing him.

“You are leaving him to me? Great, that’s exactly what I like!” Cheering in excitement, the Golden Origin Cauldron immediately leaped toward the Golden Beartiger Beast.

“W-what are you going to do?” Hearing the glee in the Saint artifact’s voice, the Golden Beartiger Beast’s body immediately stiffened in fear. “Zhang shi, I will acknowledge you as my master. Please, spare me. Spar—AHHHHH...”

Before he could finish his words, a cry of agony had already escaped from his mouth. A certain massive cauldron had descended right onto its face, and raging flames burst from it, producing a sizzling sound in contact with the other party’s skin. Soon, a fragrant aroma drifted within the cavern.

Gudong!

The Scarlet Blaze Lion, Steelbacked Bear, and the others gulped before the sight.

The heck.

That monster... It was fortunate that they had submitted, or else they could have been in the Golden Beartiger Beast’s position...

This particular emotion was intensified as they stared at the Golden Beartiger Beast’s face... The face that they had respected and feared for many years had distorted into a hideous shape indescribable using words...

...

“Zhang shi!”

Paying no heed to the Golden Origin Cauldron, which was having the time of its life, School Head Mo hurriedly rushed forward to catch up with Zhang Xuan.

After walking up to Principal Zhang, he hurriedly advised telepathically, “That ‘emperor’ seems to be an extremely powerful being. Since we have managed to subdue the forces of the Cloudmist Ridge, I don’t think that emperor will do anything for the time being. Why don’t we just leave this matter for the headquarters to deal with?”

That so-called emperor was able to heal a severely wounded Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle beast fully and raise his cultivation to 3-dan on top of that. Such prowess was unimaginable to him.

To pursue such an enemy, and not even bringing Senior Golden Origin Cauldron at that... he feared that Principal Zhang would face grave danger.

This matter was already beyond their scope of power, so it was best to leave it to the higher ranked master teachers of the headquarters.

“That ‘emperor’ will definitely escape after seeing that his loyal subordinate has perished. It will take at least around half a month for the personnel of the headquarters to arrive, and by then, it will already be too late!” Zhang Xuan shook his head.

That fellow was an incomplete soul, which was extremely useful to him, so how could he hand such a treasure over to anyone else?

If the personnel from the headquarters were to arrive, it would be impossible for him to take the soul for himself, and all he would receive were a few words of commendation. Since that was the case, he would have to take matters into his own hands.

“This...” School Head Mo hesitated for a moment before replying, “Since that’s the case, allow me to call Mu shi and the other elders here too. It should be safer that way...”

“There’s no need for that. You should stay here to manage the situation, I will go in to take a look. Don’t worry, even if I am

no match for the other party, I still do have some means up my sleeves to at least escape safely!” Zhang Xuan reassured.

That ‘emperor’ was at least a Saint realm 5-dan expert, an extremely dangerous being to go against. One reason that he dared to pursue the other party was because he had Vicious in hand, but more importantly, it was because he still had a golden page in his Library of Heaven’s Path!

It was formed when he took School Head Jiang Qingqin in as his student back then.

No matter how powerful that ‘emperor’ may be, could he be more powerful than the heavens itself?

Even Vicious was forced to kneel before it, let alone an incomplete soul.

Of course, he couldn’t mention this matter to anyone else. Even though he could tell that School Head Mo earnestly cared for him, and he trusted the latter as well, this matter was simply too important for him to reveal to anyone.

“Zhang shi...” Seeing that Zhang Xuan insisted on entering, School Head Mo cut into his path to stop him.

“Enough! ... Don’t worry, I will be fine. Have the Scarlet Blaze Lion and the other kings issue an order for all of the battling spirit beasts to return to Cloudmist Ridge. After that, inform School Head Zhao that the negotiations were a success, and have him send the students involved in the battle to rest. After such a long battle, they must be exhausted!” Zhang Xuan instructed with a wave of his hand.

School Head Mo was still hesitant, but he eventually relented and nodded. “This... Alright!”

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out a pile of high-tier spirit stones. “Here are two hundred high-tier spirit stones. Please compile a list of the students who have lost their lives in this battle and use this money to compensate their families.”

There were exactly two hundred of them in there.

As much as he loved money, there were some things that just had to be done.

Ultimately, the trigger to the beast stampede was his theft of the Cloudmist Ridge's Earth Vein Spirit Essence, so it was only right for him to compensate the victims of the conflict.

He didn't have the power to raise the dead, but if his money could aid the family members of the victims and allow them to lead better lives, perhaps it would at least allow the souls of the victims to rest in peace.

Seeing Zhang Xuan take out so many high-tier spirit stones all of the sudden, School Head Mo was shocked. He hurriedly waved his hands to reject it. "This... Zhang shi, our academy will fork out the expenses to compensate the students. How can we allow you to pay out of your own pocket!"

Even if Zhang Xuan wanted to provide some form of aid to the family members of the deceased students, he need not pay out of his pocket. The Master Teacher Academy and the Master Teacher Pavilion had their own measures for that.

Those master teachers had died while protecting the populace of Hongyuan City, so there was no way the Master Teacher Pavilion would allow their sacrifice to go unrecognized.

"Take it!" Zhang Xuan insisted with a displeased frown. "This is from me; it has nothing to do with the academy!"

"... Alright!" Seeing the determination in Zhang Xuan's eyes, School Head Mo could feel the earnest sincerity in his gesture, so he couldn't bring himself to turn the latter down anymore.

At the same time, his admiration for the latter deepened once more.

Only such an upright and selfless person would be qualified to become their principal! They had indeed made the correct decision.

I must learn from Principal Zhang's example and strive to lead an upright and altruistic life, School Head Mo vowed within.

"Alright, you should hurry along now. I will be fine here, so rest assured."

After leaving behind those instructions, Zhang Xuan turned around and followed the barely visible trail he saw with his Eye of Insight into the depths of the cavern.

885 A Single Finger

Soon, Zhang Xuan arrived at a place filled with white bones and rusty armor. Taking a close look at those bones, there were some faint engravings on them, reminiscent of those that the predecessors in the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall would leave on those whom they had recognized.

In other words, these bones belonged to master teachers.

Every single master teacher was a wealth to humanity. Looking at the sheer number of bones accumulated here, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but tremble in agitation.

Every single bone here reflected the sin of the Golden Beartiger Beast. Even if he were to die a thousand times over, that still would be insufficient to absolve him of what he had done.

You are all heroes who have sacrificed yourself for mankind; I can't allow your bones to be left lying exposed here! Zhang Xuan thought grimly.

Thus, he pushed his hand on empty ground not too far away, and a massive hole immediately emerged. After which, with a surge of his zhenqi, he swept all of the bones in the area into it.

After many years, the bones had already worn down and shattered into innumerable pieces, making it impossible to differentiate one person from another. As such, he could only bury them together. As comrades in arms, it should be acceptable for them to be buried alongside one another in death. At least, this was all he could do at the moment.

After burying them, Zhang Xuan continued to follow the trail with his Eye of Insight.

The trail that the 'emperor' had left behind disappeared beneath a certain area covered by bones earlier.

Is it beneath the ground?

It was a completely flat ground, and touching the area, it didn't seem like there were any mechanisms or formations around.

He had followed the other party's trail using his Eye of Insight, so there shouldn't be any problem with the location. How could the soul have vanished into thin air?

Could it be... All of a sudden, a thought emerged in Zhang Xuan's mind.

He flicked his wrist, and a spirit beast soon appeared before him.

"Myriad Anthive Queen, check if there is a folded space in the area!"

Folded space concerned the laws of space, which Zhang Xuan was unable to comprehend due to the limits of his cultivation. However, the Myriad Anthive Queen possessed exceptional aptitude in spatial manipulation, so it should be able to easily discern the presence of a folded space.

The Myriad Anthive Queen nodded and began sniffing around, and before long, it stood up.

"Master, there is indeed a folded space here. However, it doesn't seem to be too large. Do you want to enter to take a look?"

"As I expected!" Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Since there were no mechanisms or anything of that sort in the area, the chances were that the soul had hidden itself in a folded space.

"Of course, I have to enter to take a look!" Zhang Xuan replied without any hesitation.

His goal here was to find and capture the 'emperor' that the Golden Beartiger Beast had spoken of. He couldn't give up just because the other party was hidden in a folded space.

However, given that a Saint 5-dan expert was hiding inside, it would be dangerous for the Transcendent Mortal 9-dan Anthive Myriad Queen to enter. Thus, after some consideration, Zhang Xuan raised his gaze and said, "It will be

unsafe for you to enter the folded space... Open the entrance for me; I will enter myself.”

Without spatial manipulation capability, it was impossible for one to enter a folded space even if one were to discover one.

Take, for example, the folded space back at the Saint Ascension Platform, had Zhang Xuan been unable to find the flaws in the inscriptions and won Kong shi’s acknowledgement, he would not have been able to enter it even if he had shattered the cliff face and managed to find it somehow.

It was the same for this as well... However, given the Myriad Anthive Queen’s aptitude for spatial manipulation, it was highly likely that it possessed some kind of method to enter folded spaces.

“Alright, I will open the entrance right now. You should be able to get into the folded space just by stepping in!” the Myriad Anthive Queen replied with a nod.

After which, it began sniffing the area before abruptly grabbing onto something with its hands and ripping it apart.

Si la!

A void around the size of a human appeared before Zhang Xuan’s eyes.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Xuan flicked his wrist and took out a book. After instructing Vicious to guard him well, he stepped into the void.

...

There was no vertigo or anything. As soon as Zhang Xuan stepped through the void, he was able to see everything on the other side clearly. It was indeed not a very large space, consisting of only a diameter of around eight meters, considerably smaller than the one in the Saint Ascension Platform.

Scanning the room, he didn’t see the Bluehorn Dragon Beast that had appeared previously, but there was a peculiar round

altar, around the height of a human and a diameter of half a meter large. Unlike normal altars though, it had nothing on it.

After taking a thorough look around the room and finding nothing, Zhang Xuan frowned doubtfully.

His Eye of Insight wouldn't lie. The 'emperor' had definitely come into this folded space, but why wasn't there anything here?

Not even a soul could escape the discerning gaze of the Eye of Insight, not to mention, he was also a soul oracle as well. If the Bluehorn Dragon Beast was truly in here, it shouldn't have been able to hide from him.

Just as Zhang Xuan was about to conduct another thorough check, a shrill shriek suddenly sounded in the room, as if something was rushing right toward him.

Before he could react, an immense might was already right behind him.

Weng!

The moment that Zhang Xuan was about to be struck, a light barrier suddenly appeared around him. It was the Aerial Strike Amulet, which he had received from Yu Cheng back in the entrance examination.

The Aerial Strike Amulet could deflect an attack with the full power of a Saint realm 1-dan infused into it, and for safety, Zhang Xuan had always kept it on him instead of his storage ring. In the face of grave danger, he immediately activated it.

Kacha!

With a sharp echo, the Aerial Strike Amulet shattered, not even stopping the attack for half a breath. That rampaging might rushed forth and struck Zhang Xuan squarely on his back, and as if hit by a train, his figure was immediately sent flying.

Peng!

He crashed heavily onto the wall behind, creating a huge hole behind him.

Pu!

A large mouthful of blood spurted forth.

Even with the Aerial Strike Amulet protecting him and cushioning the blow, Zhang Xuan still ended up suffering severe injuries.

He quickly drove his Heaven's Path zhenqi to heal his injuries as he turned around to look at the origin of the assault.

There was no one in sight, and the soul of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast was nowhere to be seen either. There was only a withered finger floating in the air.

The attack he had just suffered probably came from this finger.

A single finger actually managed to crush the Aerial Strike Amulet and injure me severely? Zhang Xuan narrowed his eyes in astonishment.

He couldn't sense how powerful the finger was, but to be able to injure him so easily, it was definitely a terrifying existence.

Stabilizing his breathing, Zhang Xuan asked, "Are you the emperor that the Golden Beartiger Beast spoke of?"

"To be able to track me down to here, you do possess some capability!"

A thought from the finger reached his mind, and the language used was the Ancient Beast Language.

Judging from the voice, it seemed to be the Bluehorn Dragon Beast from before.

"To think that the soul of a great Bluehorn Dragon Beast would be living off a finger!" Zhang Xuan remarked coldly in response.

Souls wouldn't age, but they couldn't survive by themselves either. Zhang Xuan had been wondering how the Bluehorn Dragon Beast had been able to live through the ages, and looking at it now, it seemed that the other party had only managed to survive for so long by hiding within the finger.

This was similar to how Mo Hunsheng managed to survive in the Nine Hearts Lotus.

As long as a soul could find an excellent container, it could survive for a very long time.

It was for certain that the finger wasn't just an ordinary finger, but ultimately, it still wasn't a living body with complete organs. Thus, in order to sustain its life force, it had to absorb the vitality contained within flesh and blood. Perhaps... this was the reason the Bluehorn Dragon Beast had made the other party offer the bodies of master teachers to him as tributes.

Master teachers tended to possess purer zhenqi, which resulted in the vitality within their flesh and blood being far richer than ordinary cultivators. In a sense, they could be considered the ideal tonic for the finger.

Seeing Zhang Xuan exposing its origin so easily, the finger harrumphed coldly. "You do have a pair of sharp eyes. To have such insight at your age, it seems like you aren't just an ordinary student. You probably aren't the student of that fellow out there either."

"Indeed, I am not School Head Mo's student," Zhang Xuan replied.

"To be able to tame nine of the ten kings of the Cloudmist Ridge, you are indeed a capable man. You know, I am really glad that you came here... I simply love devouring talented master teachers like you. With you, I should be able to fill the vitality of this finger to the brim once more and live for another fifty years!" The finger chuckled eerily. For a moment, Zhang Xuan felt as if a pair of greedy eyes were staring at him.

"Live for another fifty years?" Zhang Xuan frowned. "What is this finger for it to allow you to escape Senescence Decline?"

Of the Five Soul Declines, the one that had left most soul oracles despairing was the Senescence Decline. The Senescence Decline dictated that as time ticked, even if a soul was protected by a powerful body, its soul energy would still continue to dissipate.

As such, not even soul oracles could live on for an eternity.

Trapped in the Nine Hearts Lotus, Mo Hunsheng had been isolated from the world. But even so, his soul energy still continued to dissipate over the years, and by the time he was released, he possessed less than a tenth of his original cultivation of Transcendent Mortal 9-dan pinnacle.

Yet, this fellow had been able to live for so long just by hiding within a finger... There was truly something eerie about the finger.

“You know about Senescence Decline?” the finger asked in astonishment.

There were many who knew about the existence of soul oracles, but very few had ever heard of the Five Soul Declines. The Five Soul Declines contained the weaknesses of the soul oracles, so they had guarded this secret tightly, unwilling to allow any outsider to learn of it. For this fellow to be aware of it as well, could he be a soul oracle too?

“Of course I do! On top of that, I also know that you have not inherited the heritage of the soul oracles. Even though you are able to survive in the form of a soul, you are just a parasite leeching off the finger, not the possessor of it,” Zhang Xuan responded.

Had the other party not attacked him, he would have been unable to gather any details on the other party via the Library of Heaven’s Path. In a sense, it was fortunate that the other party had assaulted him, allowing him to compile a book and learn more about the enemy he was going to face.

Zhang Xuan’s initial thought had been that the Bluehorn Dragon Beast had inherited the soul oracle heritage, thus allowing him to survive through many eras. However, after taking a look at the book, he realized that he had been mistaken.

The other party had only bound his soul to the finger using a special method, and through consuming the vitality of master teachers via the finger, he was able to sustain his existence. This had nothing to do with the soul arts of the soul oracles at all.

However, to be able to sustain a soul for so long, this finger was definitely no ordinary artifact.

However, it was a pity that the Bluehorn Dragon Beast could only be considered to be in coexistence with the finger, meaning that they were still two separate entities, and the one who had attacked earlier was only the soul, so there was no information reflected on the finger in the Library of Heaven's Path at all.

Otherwise, he would have just ended it straight with a smack of his book instead of wasting words on the other party.

The finger was astonished for a moment before bursting into a cold chuckle. "I never expected a young lad like you to be able to see through me so easily. Despite your young age, you are rather knowledgeable. However... the more that this is the case, the more I can't spare you! I might still have thought twice if you hadn't come into my folded space, but since you are here now, don't even dream about leaving here alive!"

Weng!

The next moment, an overwhelming aura burst forth from the finger. The illusory Bluehorn Dragon Beast that Zhang Xuan had seen earlier in the cavern swiftly emerged from the finger. Its eyes were filled with killing intent, seemingly determined to devour the young man before it.

"We were still speaking properly a moment ago, so why do you want to eat me all of a sudden? And... do you think that you will be able to succeed?" Seeing that the Bluehorn Dragon Beast was going to make its move, Zhang Xuan grasped the Book of Heaven's Path in his hands tightly, ready to throw the golden page at any moment.

However, at that moment, Vicious' voice suddenly sounded. "Leave that fellow to me..."

"Leave him to you?"

Based on what he knew of Vicious, the latter was never one to take on a job actively. Why would he suddenly step up to this task?

Zhang Xuan's query was answered very soon.

“It’s because... that finger over there is mine!”

886 I Am Also Vicious

“Yours?” Zhang Xuan was stunned.

According to what Vicious had told him previously, in the battle against Kong shi back then, he had been completely obliterated except for a droplet of blood, and after several dozen millenniums of rest, the droplet of blood finally grew to become a heart.

In other words, there should be no other parts of Vicious remaining after the battle, so why would its finger suddenly appear out of nowhere?

Noticing the nuance behind Zhang Xuan’s words, Vicious replied, “I’m not too sure what is going on either; I am still missing many parts of my memories. However, I am certain that is my finger! That fellow is making use of my body part!”

As a former powerhouse of the Master Teacher Continent who was capable of reviving himself with just a droplet of blood, even though he had lost most of his memories, he could still recognize his body parts easily.

This finger was originally just his phalanges, but after the Bluehorn Dragon Beast leeches onto it and devoured the vitality of master teachers through it, it began to recover its blood and flesh.

“You are intending to snatch it back?” Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

“Of course!”

Vicious’ heart began beating rapidly, and an overwhelming killing intent immediately surged forth from it, directed toward the finger floating in the air.

“What?”

The Bluehorn Dragon Beast’s soul, who had just left the finger for a moment, immediately felt the killing intent and began

trembling in fear. With a piercing scream, it swiftly dived back into the finger while shouting, “Vicious, save me! Save me...”

Hong long!

Another powerful killing intent spilled forth from the finger, clashing with that from the heart.

As the two auras collided, the folded space began shaking intensely, seemingly on the verge of bursting apart under the pressure.

An incredibly powerful voice, which exerted a crushing pressure, sounded from the finger. “Who are you?”

Under the immense pressure, Zhang Xuan was forced to retreat all the way to the corner of the folded space. At this moment, his eyes were widened in astonishment.

He could clearly feel the intent from the finger... and to his shock, it was identical to that of the heart sealed in the Book of Heaven’s Path!

“Who am I? I am Vicious!” the heart declared proudly.

“Nonsense, I am Vicious!” the finger refuted coldly.

“Two Viciouses?” Zhang Xuan blinked blankly.

What was going on?

Even someone as knowledgeable as him was finding it hard to process what was going on.

“Bullsh*t, I am the real Vicious! How can a puny finger like you be Vicious?” the heart roared furiously.

The finger harrumphed coldly. “Back then, Vicious stood at the very top of the world, devoid of fear for even Kong shi. How could he possibly submit to an insignificant master teacher like the lad over there and listen to his commands? Stop soiling my reputation any further! You’d better sit obediently as I devour you, or else I will kill you along with your master!”

“You want to devour me? Hah, let me see if you have the capability to do so!” With a furious roar, the heart leaped

forward furiously along with the Book of Heaven's Path with unbelievable momentum to strike the finger.

Boom!

The finger retaliated with a tap, and a loud explosion sounded.

Suffering grave injuries from the tap, the heart convulsed intensely as it tumbled furiously backward, returning to Zhang Xuan's hands.

"Zhang shi, hurry up and release the book's seal on me. Otherwise, we might all die here..." the heart implored.

"What is going on?" Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

"It could be because I was too powerful when I was still alive, so even a droplet of blood or the phalanges of a finger could form an individual entity in itself. During the time when my main body was still alive, these individual entities could still be managed and even combined into one. However, with the death of my main body, the sentience that sprouted in each individual part viewed itself as the real Vicious, resulting in the current circumstances. In order to fully recover, it seems like we will have to devour one another... but the side that is being devoured will stand to lose his consciousness once and for all!" Vicious hurriedly explained.

"There's such a matter?" Zhang Xuan widened his eyes in astonishment.

To be able to revive oneself from just a droplet of blood... This was way too overpowered!

"Un. That fellow has devoured innumerable master teachers, and the vitality he has absorbed has made him far stronger than me. Unless you dispel the seal on me, I won't be a match for him at all," Vicious hurriedly explained.

"Dispel the seal on you?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

He could indeed release the seal from the Book of Heaven's Path on him with a single thought, but it would be a huge risk to do so.

No matter what, the other party was an expert who had stood toe-to-toe against Kong shi at one point in his life. It was only

due to the prowess of the Book of Heaven's Path that the other party was obeying his orders, and if he were to release the seal, the other party could very well disobey his orders and even turn against him.

Feeling a burst of confidence after successfully overpowering the heart in the direct clash earlier, the finger sneered coldly, "Hah, with powers like yours, you still dare to vie with me? Die!"

Otherworldly Demons could grow by devouring humans, and master teachers could be considered an ideal tonic to them. Even though the Heart Vicious was able to make a substantial recovery using the spiritual energy in the underground chamber, it couldn't be compared with the Phalanges Vicious, who had recuperated by devouring innumerable master teachers over the years.

More importantly, the finger could be considered one of the more flexible and active portion of a body, so it wielded might superior to the heart.

Hong long!

The finger gathered its might and charged at the heart once more. Overwhelming killing intent gushed over like a sharp sword, threatening to pierce through all that stood in its path.

Feeling the immense power of the finger, the heart panicked and quickly urged Zhang Xuan, "Hurry up and dispel the seal!"

"There is no need for that. It'll suffice as long as I seal that fellow as well," Zhang Xuan said.

Releasing the seal on Vicious simply wasn't an option.

If he were to release the other party, that would be no different from leaving his life in the hands of the other party.

And to leave one's life in the hands of an Otherworldly Demon was sheer foolishness.

Since that wasn't an option, he would just have to seal the finger as well. At the very most, it would just get a little

noisier as the two Viciouses wrestled with one another in the book.

Having made up his mind, Zhang Xuan was just about to call upon the golden page when a thought suddenly flashed across his mind.

Since he had the power to release the seal on the heart, was it possible for him to put the finger in as well?

If that was the case, he wouldn't have to waste an additional golden page.

The golden page was his ultimate trump card, so it was best to save as many of them as he could.

“Go!” Zhang Xuan immediately put his theory to the test.

With a thought, the Book of Heaven's Path, in which the heart was sealed, immediately flew straight for the incoming finger.

Hu la!

The finger, which was just on its path to slaughter the heart, suddenly felt an oppressive power shrouding it, which froze the finger on the spot.

“What is this...” the finger exclaimed in shock.

It struggled furiously in an attempt to escape, but as if pinned down by a mountain, it found itself unable to move at all.

The book before it seemed to harness the laws of the world, forming an unbreakable cage.

“Haha, didn't you just mock me a moment ago? Let's see how you are going to escape from this!” Seeing the finger getting suppressed by the book as well, just as he had been back then, the heart couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter.

The other party had just claimed that he was a fake and that the Vicious who had dared to fight against Kong shi couldn't possibly submit to a Transcendent Mortal 9-dan student. But with this, the other party should understand that it wasn't only him... Even if the real Vicious was standing before this, he would have to kneel down as well!

This trump card of Zhang shi's was simply that fearsome!

There was nothing higher than the heavens in this world. No matter how much power or authority one held, even if one was unmatched by any other being in the world, it was all futile!

No matter how much power one accrued, could one still be stronger than the heavens?

And as long as one continued to exist beneath the heavens, one would have no choice but to bow before it!

“NO!” Hearing the other party’s mocking, the finger was horrified.

Kacha!

Amidst the finger’s piercing screams, the book abruptly closed, sealing the finger within it.

That finger had devoured innumerable master teachers, granting him power considerably greater than the heart. Nevertheless, it was still nothing more than a hatchling before the Book of Heaven’s Path.

Hu!

Seeing that it had worked, Zhang Xuan heaved a sigh of relief. With a slight grab, the Book of Heaven’s Path returned to his palm. He flipped it open swiftly and saw the finger and heart sealed alongside one another.

Previously, the heart had only taken up half of the page, and with the addition of the finger, the entire page was filled up.

This likely meant that this page was already full, and it couldn’t contain anything else anymore.

“I am the real one; you are the fake!”

“No, I am the real one; you are the fake!”

The heart on the upper half and the finger on the lower half glared at one another viciously as they bellowed in fury.

Until now, the finger still could hardly believe what had just happened to it.

As the phalanges of the great Vicious, who had faced Kong shi head on back then, even if a Saint realm 9-dan expert was

here, it would still have some means up its sleeves to escape safely. Yet, in this instant, it was trapped within this ancient book.

It howled angrily and struggled with all its might, but it found itself unable to break free. “Where is this place?”

This book seemed to harness the will of the heavens, a lofty power that gazed coldly on all existences beneath, eradicating all who dared stand in its way.

Putting aside him, any existences that lived beneath the heavens, no matter how powerful, had to bow down to it.

The heart harrumphed. “Don’t bother with that futile struggling. Just let me devour you and end it once and for all!”

“Let you devour me? Dream on! It is your fate to be devoured by me... and that lad as well, I will kill him as soon as I find a way to get out! All of you shall die by my hand. There is no one who has dared offend me, Vicious, and ever met a good end...” the finger cried furiously.

But before it could finish its words, a finger suddenly flicked lightly on it, harnessing a surge of pure zhenqi.

Peng!

Before it could even react, it was already tumbling furiously within the page. Struck by the pure surge of zhenqi, it found itself unable to catch its breath.

It was as if that surge of zhenqi was its nemesis, capable of subduing it easily.

“Shut up!” Zhang Xuan frowned.

Even if you still carry the consciousness from your previous self and think that you are Vicious, in here, you are nothing more than a simple image. Learn your place and keep your mouth shut!

“You dare to flick me? Do you know who I am...”

The finger was exactly like how the heart had been when it first arrived, indignant and incomparably arrogant.

It thought that it was still the great emperor of the Otherworldly Demons, which even Kong shi himself had feared.

Peng!

But before it could finish speaking, another flick struck it.

There was only one way to make that fellow submit, and it was to pummel him!

Sealed in the Book of Heaven's Path, even if the other party was the peerless monarch of the world, the other party's life and death would still be grasped in his hands.

Peng peng peng!

Under consecutive flicks, the finger in the book nearly lost its life.

“You...” Howling furiously, the finger finally realized its current standing and dared not speak arrogantly anymore.

Finally, after seeing that he had finally managed to stamp out the other party's arrogance, Zhang Xuan began his interrogation.

“Who are you? What is with the Bluehorn Dragon Beast? Why do you have two consciousness within you? Explain yourself well, or else... Vicious, I will make you know what true viciousness is!”

Whether you are Vicious or not, at the moment, you are nothing to me. If you dare cross me again, I will make you regret ever being born in this world! The bones of a finger or toe.

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“I...”

Knowing that it was helpless before the other party as long as it was trapped within this book, the finger finally abandoned its pride and spoke. “I am the phalanges of a finger of Vicious, and it is only after several dozen millenniums of sleep that I finally gained my own consciousness. The Bluehorn Dragon Beast was the emperor of the Cloudmist Ridge, and in order to hasten my awakening, I bound his soul to me and had him work under me...”

Soon, it went through the entire story.

It wasn't too far from what Zhang Xuan had guessed previously.

No one could tell for sure what had happened in the battle between Vicious and Kong shi back then, but one thing for sure was that the phalanges of a finger of his had been left behind somehow.

Vicious had already reached the level of being able to revive from just a droplet of blood, so even though his phalanges had suffered severe damage, resulting in a lengthy sleep of several dozen millenniums, it still managed to regain consciousness.

Afterwards, by some stroke of luck, it was found by the emperor of the Cloudmist Ridge.

In order to quickly recover, it used a unique method it possessed to bind the other party's soul to him and made use of it to lord over the saint beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge.

In exchange for replenishing the Earth Vein Spirit Essence in the cavern, the saint beasts would capture master teachers to feed it.

Naturally, with its incredible means, it was able to raise the cultivation of the Golden Beartiger Beast easily as well.

However, one thing that was not within its calculations was that Zhang Xuan would possess such a powerful artifact, and it was this that resulted in its current plight.

As for the matter regarding Wu Yangzi... around two thousand years ago, a few Otherworldly Demons had visited the Cloudmist Ridge to request their assistance.

At that moment, Vicious had fallen into a short moment of hibernation after consuming several master teachers, which placed the Bluehorn Dragon Beast in charge for that period of time. Learning of the motive of those Otherworldly Demons, it had sent a few saint beasts to assist them in kidnapping Wu Yangzi.

The Bluehorn Dragon Beast was only an incomplete soul, but after spending innumerable years with Vicious' consciousness, it had learned of quite a number of its secrets. While Vicious was unconscious, it had secretly told the Otherworldly Demons about the existence of the droplet of blood... Eventually, those Otherworldly Demons successfully retrieved the heart and brought it back to the underground chamber. It was under their nourishment that the heart eventually regained consciousness.

Thus, it could be said that this finger was the reason the heart was able to regain its consciousness.

After asking everything that should be asked, Zhang Xuan still had some matters that he hadn't figured out. But just as he was thinking about them deeply, a voice suddenly sounded by his ear.

“Zhang shi, allow me to devour this fellow. I should be able to recover a fair bit of my strength with this...”

It was from the heart.

“You want to devour it?”

“That's right. Based on my deduction, it seems that even though Vicious was destroyed in the battle back then, he has left quite a few hands. Most likely, there are quite a few of us out there that possess consciousness as well. Even if I absorb spiritual energy for another hundred thousand years, I still

won't be able to return to my peak... The only way to do so quickly is to find my other body parts and devour them!" the heart said.

"As long as I devour a sufficient number of them, even if I can't return to my peak, I wouldn't be too far away from it!"

"I see." Zhang Xuan nodded.

When he saw the finger claiming that it was Vicious as well, he had already deduced this much.

There was a famous, albeit brutal, way to groom an expert within an organization. It was to gather a huge bunch of men and have them face off against one another, and the final one standing would be strongest of them all.

Vicious knew that there was a high chance that he could lose his life fighting against Kong shi, so he had used some secret art to preserve his heart, finger, and perhaps a few more body parts so that he could still survive if a mishap occurred.

However, in order to regain his former strength, his body parts would have to devour one another, and the final consciousness standing would become the real Vicious.

"As long as you pledge loyalty to me, not only will I give you this finger to devour, I can even help you find the other parts of Vicious so that you can regain your strength," Zhang Xuan said calmly.

To him, it mattered not who became the final Vicious as long as the other party was loyal to him.

The heart had followed him for quite some time, and they had gone through quite a few ordeals together. Thus, it was the closest to him, so the probability to successfully tame it was the highest at the moment.

As for the finger... considering that it had brutally slaughtered so many master teachers and devoured their flesh and blood, Zhang Xuan was reluctant to have it serve as his subordinate even if he could tame it.

"Pledge loyalty?" The heart fell silent.

Even though it was powerless after getting trapped in the book, its consciousness was still one of the domineering Vicious who had fought head-on against Kong shi. As such, it was difficult for it to lower its pride and pledge loyalty to another.

“That’s right.” Placing his hands behind his back, Zhang Xuan waited patiently for the other party to make his decision.

Possessing the Library of Heaven’s Path, it was only a matter of time before he reached the top of the world. In his view, Vicious’ loyalty could only be considered icing on the cake. With or without it, he would still be able to forge a path ahead.

After a moment of silence, the heart finally gave the word.
“Fine, I agree.”

The capabilities and means that the young man had displayed thus far could even leave the legendary 9-star master teachers astounded.

Perhaps, the other party might really be able to bring it to greater heights, and perhaps... surpass even Kong shi!

Agree, and there would be a chance that it could make a full recovery and even reach greater heights. Reject, and it would be trapped in the book forever, never to make a comeback. Which was the correct choice? It didn’t take a genius to figure that out.

Seeing that he had the other party’s agreement, Zhang Xuan said, “Offer your soul then!”

The other party’s betrayal wasn’t a risk he could afford to take, and a couple of words and promises held no weight at all.

Only with the other party’s soul held hostage in his hands would he be able to put his unconditional trust in the other party.

“Yes.”

Without any hesitation, the heart sent a fragment of its soul into Zhang Xuan’s glabella, entering his consciousness.

Feeling the soul fragment, Zhang Xuan nodded in satisfaction.

Previously, he was only able to make Vicious obey his commands through the prowess of the Book of Heaven's Path. However, after the soul offering, he now possessed absolute control over the other party, similar to a tamed beast. The other party had no choice but to obey his commands unconditionally.

“Master!”

Offering one's soul was equivalent to acknowledging the other party as one's master; the heart put aside its pride and lowered its posture.

Zhang Xuan waved his hands. “Call me young master instead.”

“Yes, Young Master!” the heart responded.

“With your current strength, will you be able to devour him? Do you need my help?”

“Young Master, my strength is currently beneath his, so it will be extremely difficult for me to succeed. However, if you can lend me Kong shi's writing to use, I am confident that I should be able to overpower him!” the heart said.

“You want to borrow Kong shi's writing?” Zhang Xuan frowned.

It hadn't been easy for him to obtain Kong shi's personal handwriting, and his heart had nearly bled dry when he realized that Vicious had devoured a third of it the previous time that he helped his clone act as Yang Xuan. To think that he would still dare think of devouring more of it...

“Young Master, Otherworldly Demons grow by consuming humans, and that finger has devoured many master teachers over the years. As such, its strength and spirit are far stronger than mine. Without Kong shi's writing, I fear that I won't be an opponent for it, and I might even end up being the one devoured instead!” the heart said.

“... Alright then. Here is the remaining two-thirds of Kong shi's writing. Tell me, how much do you need to successfully devour that finger?” Zhang Xuan asked with a deep frown.

“That... I am not too sure either!” the heart said hesitantly.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xuan sighed deeply and said, “Fine, I will help you weaken that finger first before you make a move. That should save a bit of Kong shi’s writing...”

He might not be a match for the finger outside, but within the Book of Heaven’s Path, his Heaven’s Path zhenqi was a lethal weapon.

Having come to a decision, Zhang Xuan began infusing his zhenqi into the book.

“AHHHHH...”

Under the assault of the zhenqi, the finger began rolling around the place as a shrill scream echoed from its consciousness. It took a while before the voice began to die down.

Watching this sight, the heart couldn’t help but convulse slightly. Nevertheless, knowing that this was a chance for it to strike, it rushed forward and sent a surge of killing intent toward the finger, attempting to subdue it.

...

Sometime later, the movements of the finger finally came to a complete halt. Abandoning its previous arrogant attitude, it lay humbly in the book.

...

“Young Master!”

After an inestimable length of time, a voice sounded from the consciousness in the finger.

The heart had successfully devoured the ‘Vicious’ within the finger and assimilated it into a part of it.

“Young Master, the clash with that fellow’s will while devouring it has depleted my spirit. I need to rest for a moment... I have already wiped away the consciousness in the soul of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast, so you should be able to absorb it to nourish your soul,” Vicious said.

Following which, he felt a surge of soul energy leaving the book.

Sensing the incredible purity of the soul, Zhang Xuan's eyes lit up.

Even though the emperor of the Cloudmist Ridge was only an incomplete soul, it wielded power comparable to a Saint realm 5-dan. If he could absorb the energy in the soul and assimilate it into his own, his soul cultivation could rise significantly.

However, this wasn't the time to do so yet. The battle against the Cloudmist Ridge had just ended, and there were many other things that he still had to attend to.

Taking Kong shi's scroll back from Vicious, Zhang Xuan took a look at it and saw yet another thousand words had disappeared from it, meaning only a third of the original writing remained. His eyelids began twitching furiously, but a moment later, he sighed deeply and stowed it into his storage ring.

Any other master teacher who obtained Kong shi's writing would worship it as if it was their ancestor. He was probably the only one who trampled on it in such a manner.

After returning to the cavern, Zhang Xuan instructed the Myriad Anthive Queen to devour the folded space.

With the Bluehorn Emperor Beast, the culprit behind the deaths of countless master teachers, destroyed, the Cloudmist Ridge would no longer pose a threat anymore. The deceased master teachers who had died under its tyranny should also be able to rest in peace now.

As the folded space wasn't too large, and the Myriad Anthive Queen's cultivation was also significantly higher than before, it only took an hour this time for it to devour it completely.

After which, he returned the Myriad Anthive Queen to the nest before heading out.

When he finally returned to the area where the Earth Vein Spirit Essence was stored, he saw the Golden Beartiger Beast lying flat like a pancake on the ground, deader than ever.

Upon noticing him, the Golden Origin Cauldron immediately rushed over to greet him.

“Master, I have killed this fellow for you, and he had quite a few good things with him...” With a fawning smile, it took out a storage ring and passed it over to Zhang Xuan.

“Storage ring?” Zhang Xuan frowned for a moment before he suddenly recalled something.

While spirit beasts were unable to access storage rings, saint beasts could. As the oldest king of the Cloudmist Ridge, the Golden Beartiger Beast had at least lived for a thousand year now. Over the years, it had killed many experts and collected their possessions as spoils of war, so it should have considerable wealth in its ring.

Zhang Xuan hadn't really thought of that earlier, but it seemed like his loyal Ding Ding had already helped him settle this matter.

The seal on a storage ring would be erased upon the death of its master, so Zhang Xuan was able to easily claim possession of it using a droplet of blood. Immersing his consciousness into the ring, he took a peek at what was within.

The area inside was far larger than his current storage ring, spanning a diameter of several hundred meters. There were all kinds of treasures stacked up into towering piles all around, and just the number of middle-tier spirit stones in itself numbered in the tens of millions.

There were also around several hundred high-tier spirit stones placed together as well.

Besides that, there were also valuable medicinal herbs, high-grade pills, and rare ores of all sorts scattered all around the place in unimaginable quantities

As for weapons, there were several hundreds of them, of which, around forty were at Spirit pinnacle, and three of them were even at Half-Saint!

“Incredible!” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless by the grandeur before him.

Ever since his transcension to this world, he had worked diligently to earn money, not willing to spare even a single gold coin in his path. He had thought that with his hard work, he had already accumulated quite a large fortune for himself, but compared to this king of the Cloudmist Ridge, what he had was truly nothing in comparison.

But thinking about it... the Cloudmist Ridge had kidnapped Elder Wu Yangzi back then, so it must have taken quite a bit of treasure from the latter too. Just that in itself was sufficient to make it filthy rich.

It had been two thousand years, so the Golden Beartiger Beast might not have even been born back then, but as the spokesperson of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast, it should have inherited most of the accumulated wealth of the Cloudmist Ridge.

888 Sinned!

That was only a small portion of the storage ring. What had particularly caught Zhang Xuan's eye was the incredible pile of saint beast inner cores by the side.

Saint beasts might enjoy a longer lifespan than humans, but death ultimately came to all. Accumulated over several millenniums, the number of saint beast inner cores in the storage ring had reached an unbelievable number—there were several hundred of them!

Every single one of these inner cores was incredibly valuable and could be sold at an astronomical price.

After looking through all of the treasures within the storage ring, Zhang Xuan was completely dumbstruck.

Compared to the Golden Beartiger Beast, he felt like a beggar flaunting a coin in his bowl before a tycoon.

Delighted, Zhang Xuan turned to the Golden Origin Cauldron and said, "You have done well getting this for me! How do you wish to be rewarded?"

With so many treasures in the storage ring, it was very likely that the Golden Beartiger Beast had hidden it somewhere discreet so that no one else could get to it. If the Golden Origin Cauldron had not gotten it out of the Golden Beartiger Beast, he might have just missed it.

Despite Ding Ding's occasional silly behavior, it seemed like it was still reliable in crucial moments like this!

"Hehe, it will suffice as long as Master doesn't forget to raise my strength," the Golden Origin Cauldron said.

"Don't worry!" Zhang Xuan nodded.

Currently, the Golden Origin Cauldron was only a Saint low-tier artifact. As long as Zhang Xuan raised his smithing capability further, he would be able to help raise its tier.

It was also due to this promise that the Golden Origin Cauldron had willingly submitted to Zhang Xuan back then. Otherwise, as the proud Guardian Saint Artifact of the academy, it couldn't possibly have acknowledged anyone as its master so easily!

Threat might force another to submit, but it would only eventually breed acrimony and result in betrayal. It took a combination of both the carrot and the stick in order to instill true loyalty.

After leaving the cavern with the Golden Origin Cauldron, Zhang Xuan was welcomed by the Scarlet Blaze Lion, Tigerhead Beast, and the other kings.

“How is it?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Master, all of the spirit beasts that were fighting have been pulled back, and they are currently waiting for you at the foot of the mountain!” the Scarlet Blaze Beast hurriedly said.

After everything they had gone through, they no longer dared harbor any second thoughts regarding their loyalty to the young man before them.

“Let's head over.” Zhang Xuan nodded as he began making his way to the foot of the mountain.

They soon saw thousands of spirit beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge gathered orderly at the foot of the mountain. As Zhang Xuan appeared before their eyes, a commotion broke out amid them; each and every one of them widened their eyes in astonishment.

They were in the midst of fighting against the Master Teacher Academy when they were suddenly brought here. They had no idea what exactly had happened, and why the kings would choose to negotiate with the humans.

Stepping forward, Zhang Xuan began speaking without any hesitation.

“The growth of a beast is reliant not only on absorbing the essence of the world and spiritual energy, but to emulate the behavior of humans and cultivate...”

...

Around the time that Zhang Xuan arrived at the foot of the Cloudmist Ridge, School Head Mo also arrived at Leiyuan Peak.

It had been almost four hours since the duo went to the Cloudmist Ridge to negotiate, and Zhao Bingxu had already gathered all of the students along with Mu shi and the other school heads in preparation to fight a bitter war.

When they saw School Head Mo return alone, without the principal by his side, their complexion turned incredibly awful.

Zhao Bingxu immediately rushed forward, grabbed School Head Mo, and asked him in agitation, “Where is the principal? How is he?”

“Mo Zhu, how can you allow the principal to face such danger alone? If something happens to him, how do you intend to face the teachers and students of the Master Teacher Academy?” Wei Ranxue glared at School Head Mo so coldly that it felt that the latter would freeze on the spot.

When Zhao Bingxu returned and informed them that their principal had gone to the Cloudmist Ridge to negotiate in order to stop the war and reduce their casualties, all of them nearly had died of shock.

What kind of place was the Cloudmist Ridge?

It was a land dominated by spirit beasts and saint beasts, and nearly all cultivators who dared to tread those lands were never heard from again. It wasn't easy for them to find a new principal to lead their academy to greater heights, and if they were to lose their principal over this matter, they would be the sinners of history, and no amount of time would wash away their sin.

“I...” A bitter smile filled with helplessness emerged on School Head Mo's face.

Even if I really had tried to stop the principal, do you think that I would have been able to stop him?

“Enough! This isn’t the time to be talking about this. How is Senior Uncle doing, and what is the current situation on the Cloudmist Ridge?” Mu shi interjected sharply. “I heard that the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge are all vicious beings who are filled with hostility for humans. You probably met with a lot of trouble negotiating with them, right?”

The others also quickly turned to School Head Mo, waiting intently for him to respond.

“Trouble? ...” School Head Mo had no idea where he should start from.

There was indeed a lot of trouble, but they weren’t the ones who faced trouble.

After spending some time organizing his thoughts, School Head Mo began speaking.

“The Ten Indomitable Kings demanded that the negotiation be conducted in a certain cavern, and we headed over and began discussing how we should resolve the conflict. In the midst of that, our principal... headed out for a moment, and when he finally returned, out of the Ten Indomitable Kings... nine had become his tamed beast! And the three thousand aerial spirit beasts, too, had acknowledged him as their master! In other words, other than the spirit beasts who had battled with the students earlier, all of the Half-Saint, Nascent Saint, and Saint realm beasts on the Cloudmist Ridge have all become our principal’s tamed beasts...”

Before School Head Mo could finish his words, he noticed a bizarre silence hanging in the air. Perplexed, he raised his head to take a look, only to see all of the school heads and Mu shi staring at him with slackened jaws and bulging eyes, as if the limits of their rationality had been challenged.

Seeing their expressions, School Head Mo wasn’t surprised in the least. There was no one in the world who wouldn’t react in this way after hearing such news.

To head to a negotiation and end up taming all of the enemy’s forces...

Who could have imagined that?

Negotiation? More like a seizure of property!

Did it really have to be so exaggerated?

“That is everything that happened...” Looking at the looks of disbelief of those around him, School Head Mo could only shrug helplessly.

To be honest, if he hadn't been there to witness it himself, even he would never have believed such a story.

Ever since the establishment of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge had been a huge threat. Many of the previous principals had attempted to do something about it, but their efforts had been futile.

Yet, the principal of the current generation, despite being yet to be inaugurated, had already completely overturned the other party's nest!

On top of that, not only did he snap the threat from its very roots, he had even tamed all of the saint beasts, which would bolster the forces of the Master Teacher Academy significantly!

With this additional force, perhaps the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy could be pushed up a single ranking among the Four Great Academies of Qingyuan Empire.

With his head still spinning from having heard such an unbelievable epic, Zhao Bingxu asked, “Where is the principal now?”

“He had me return to organize the students while he deals with some miscellaneous affairs. He is probably still at the Cloudmist Ridge at the moment,” School Head Mo replied.

“Zhong Dingchun, have your students take the wounded to your Physician School for treatment. Xu Changqing, get the students of your Martial Arts School to remain on guard in case a battle occurs. As for the other school heads, follow me to the Cloudmist Ridge!” Knowing that his Senior Uncle was still in the Cloudmist Ridge, Mu shi swiftly made arrangements.

Naturally, the responsibility for treating the wounded students would fall on the Physician School. And even though School Head Mo had said that the problem was resolved, the situation wasn't entirely clear yet, so the Master Teacher Academy still had to keep its guard up in case an accident occurred. Of the ten schools, the Martial Arts School boasted the greatest fighting power, so they were left to stand on guard.

“Yes!” Zhong Dingchun and Xu Changqing nodded before rushing off to make preparations.

“Let's go!” Mu shi nodded before rushing over to the Cloudmist Ridge with the other school heads.

...

“Look, what is that?”

Before they even reached their destination, they suddenly noticed innumerable spirit beasts gathered at the foot of the mountain with their bodies lying on the floor. Their eyes were gleaming in gratitude and respect, a vast contrast from the savagery and viciousness when they were battling before.

At the very forefront of the army of spirit beasts was a young man standing on the back of one of the Saint realm kings. His nonchalant voice echoed resoundingly, drawing in an overwhelming amount of zhenqi into the surroundings that it created an illusion of lotus flowers falling from the sky. Listening to the words of that young man, the spirit beasts seemed to fall into a trance.

This was the ability that only 5-star master teachers possessed, Spirit Gathering Diction!

“This is... a lecture for the spirit beasts?”

The arriving master teachers were stunned.

They had seen master teachers conducting lectures for their peers, students, and fellow cultivators, but this was the very first time they had seen anyone lecture spirit beasts.

And more importantly, every single one of the countless spirit beasts in the area was listening intently to each word that was

spoken, and some of them were even using their snouts or paws to make notes on the ground.

In the midst of their shock, Zhang Xuan's voice suddenly sounded.

“... Alright, I will end the lecture here. You are dismissed!”

Roar!

Roar!

But despite Zhang Xuan's words, the spirit beasts didn't scatter. Instead, they raised their heads and roared in unison, the sheer volume of which shook even the clouds in the sky. After which, they rose from the ground, and a droplet of blood floated out of each of their glabellae and toward Zhang Xuan.

“The heck...”

Watching a wave of fresh blood rushing toward him, threatening to drown him within it, Zhang Xuan's knee weakened, and he nearly collapsed on the spot.

I was just conducting a casual lecture for you all; no one is asking you to acknowledge me as your master...

Besides, even if you all want to acknowledge me as your master, there is no need for you to do it together, right? A droplet of blood from nearly a hundred thousand spirit beasts... That is probably enough to fill even a swimming pool!

Zhang Xuan fell into a frenzy, but Mu shi and the others nearly lost their minds.

It seemed like their principal didn't intend to stop with just taming the Ten Indomitable Kings... His aim was all of the spirit beasts in the Cloudmist Ridge!

A hundred thousand spirit beasts... With such a force, their principal could overrun even a Tier-1 Empire like Hongyuan Empire with a single word!

“To make so many spirit beasts acknowledge him as their master and resolve such a huge threat for Hongyuan Empire... T-this... there is no way to calculate his contribution at all! I

must report this to the Beast Hall!” School Head Mo muttered with quivering lips.

To make all of the spirit beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge acknowledge him as their master with a single lecture, there was no one who had achieved such a feat before him, and it was likely that no one else would after him... The contribution from doing so was immeasurable!

On top of that, the other party had also tamed the Ten Indomitable Kings and many Nascent Saint and Half-Saint beasts as well...

If Zhang Xuan was only an ordinary 7-star beast tamer with no contribution to the Beast Hall before, at this very moment, he could be considered a hero of the Beast Hall!

He couldn't help but remember the saying, 'Silent in rest, devastating in action'. This sure was applicable to Zhang Xuan at that moment!

In the midst of his shock, School Head Mo didn't forget to heave a sigh of relief too. It's fortunate that I had the foresight to apply for the 7-star beast tamer emblem for him earlier on so that he need not take the examination. Otherwise, I can hardly imagine what the state of the Beast Tamer School would be in now...

After seeing the tragic states that the Blacksmith School, Physician School, and Apothecary School were in after a visit from their principal, School Head Mo deeply feared that the other party would come to take their beast tamer examination as well, so he took the initiative to apply for it in advance. From the looks of it, it was probably the wisest decision he had ever made in his life.

Otherwise, if all of the spirit beasts and saint beasts in the Beast Tamer School were to take him as their master as well, there would definitely be a huge riot among the students!

“Let's go over...” Suppressing his shock, Mu shi raised his trembling hands and gestured for everyone to head over to Zhang Xuan's side.

But moving over, they found themselves faced with a tearful young man.

The crowd hurriedly clasped their fists and greeted him.
“Paying respect to Principal Zhang!”

As if meeting his savior, Zhang Xuan hurriedly rushed over and pleaded with reddened eyes. “You are here... Have these spirit beasts gone insane? Why are they so insistent on taking me as their master? School Head Mo, you are the head of the Beast Tamer School... Do you have any idea how one can halt the acknowledgement ceremony?”

He had really only come here to conduct a lecture; he had no intentions of becoming their master! None at all!

“Halt the acknowledgement ceremony? I fear that there is no way to do so...” School Head Mo shook his head.

It was extremely difficult to tame even one of these spirit beasts, and their principal had managed to tame all of them. Yet, he still had such an expression on his face... Principal Zhang, do you know that you are drawing a lot of hostility from beast tamers around the world?

On the other hand, upon hearing that there was no way to undo the acknowledgement ceremony, a look of helplessness and despair surfaced on Zhang Xuan. A mouthful of blood spurted from his mouth, and he couldn't help but exclaim in agony.

“I have sinned!”

889 Wei Ruyan's Awakening

Zhang Xuan had truly dug his own grave this time around. Taming a few spirit beasts could give him a few more cards to play in times of crisis, but so many spirit beasts... There was truly no need for that.

But these fellows were insistent on taking him as their master, and none were willing to back down at all. If he were to turn them down, it could possibly result in an upheaval. It would be foolish to undo all of the effort that had gone into calming down the Cloudmist Ridge.

In other words... he had no choice but to accept all of the spirit beasts.

Indignant! Very indignant!

What in the world is this?

Putting everything aside, just taking in the souls of so many spirit beasts would put a huge burden on him. If not for Zhang Xuan's unbelievably powerful soul, he would have long lost his sense of self and gone insane!

But even so, he still suffered severe vertigo from having to take in so many souls, and his eyes turned bloodshot.

Tears streamed down his face endlessly, and he found himself choked by agitation.

I only came with the sole intention of conducting a lecture for you; I really had no intention to tame any of you at all...

Please, spare me...

...

After around twelve hours of effort, Zhang Xuan finally managed to take in all of the offered souls from the spirit beasts.

By the end of it, he was feeling so fatigued that he could faint any minute.

But still, he knew that this wasn't the time to rest yet. It had been a day since Wei Ruyan's soul was placed into the Bodhi Saint Tree to be nurtured, and she should be waking up soon. He had to take a look at her condition.

Otherwise, if the Bodhi Saint Tree were to succumb to Wei Ruyan's unique constitution due to extended exposure to it, his efforts could end in futility once again.

The Innate Poison Constitution was simply too powerful. Even Zhang Xuan didn't dare to underestimate its prowess.

Thus, leaving the Cloudmist Ridge, Zhang Xuan rushed all the way to the royal palace.

It was already late at night, but with all of the commotion in the Cloudmist Ridge, Yu Shenqing was in no mood to rest at all. Thus, upon hearing that Zhang Xuan had arrived, he rushed out to welcome him.

"Has anything peculiar happened to the Bodhi Saint Tree?" Zhang Xuan asked.

"Nothing that I can think of..." Yu Shenqing was confused by Zhang Xuan's abrupt question.

"Let's head over there to take a look."

Without explaining himself, Zhang Xuan hurried over to the residence where the Bodhi Saint Tree was located under Yu Shenqing's lead.

Soon, in the residence, he finally saw a lush Bodhi Saint Tree that didn't show any signs of being poisoned, and he heaved a long sigh of relief.

"Zhang shi, I will be taking my leave now. If you have anything that you require my help on, feel free to let my men know." Knowing that Zhang Xuan was going to settle a private matter, Yu Shenqing clasped his fist and bade farewell.

After Yu Shenqing's departure, Zhang Xuan double checked that there was no one in the vicinity of the residence before drawing out his soul to take a look at the Bodhi Saint Tree.

Under the nourishment of the Bodhi Saint Tree, Wei Ruyan's soul had already grown significantly stronger. Nodding in

satisfaction, Zhang Xuan drew her soul out of the tree before gently placing it back into her body. After which, he used his soul energy to facilitate the fusion process between her body and soul.

It was no easy feat to fuse a separated soul and body together, but it was fortunate that Zhang Xuan cultivated the Heaven's Path Soul Art. This granted his soul a unique property that allowed him to possess the body of another without suffering any significant rejection... Nevertheless, it still took around an hour before he managed to fuse Wei Ruyan's body and soul together perfectly.

After doing all of that, Zhang Xuan tapped his finger on the other party's glabella and said, "Wake up!"

Weng!

A crisp buzz sounded, and Wei Ruyan began to open her eyes slowly.

It must be said that despite her many years of sickness, Wei Ruyan was still an incredible beauty on par with Wang Ying. What particularly caught Zhang Xuan's attention were her eyes. Perhaps it was because she had never witnessed the evils in the world; her eyes were extremely bright and clear, reflecting the innocence of an infant.

"You are..."

Upon seeing the young man before her, a perplexed look surfaced on Wei Ruyan's face.

She had been asleep all along, so this was the very first time she had met the benefactor who had saved her life.

"I am Zhang Xuan, a master teacher. I have managed to successfully cure the affliction you are suffering from, so you need not live a life filled with pain and suffering anymore." Zhang Xuan nodded.

"My affliction has been cured?" Wei Ruyan could hardly believe what she was hearing.

For as long as she could remember, she had always been plagued by an affliction. Her father had taken her to many

physicians and master teachers, and she had tried all kinds of treatments in the world, but nothing seemed to work. In the depths of her heart, she had already given up long ago.

When she fainted the previous time, she had thought that she would never come to again. Yet, she found herself opening her eyes to this world once more, and a man even told her that she was cured of her affliction. This was... She dared not believe what she was hearing to be true.

Seeing through her thoughts, Zhang Xuan smiled gently and said, "Try standing up."

"Stand up?"

Confused, Wei Ruyan pressed her palm softly against the ground to prop herself up, but to her astonishment, her body flew seven meters into the air instead, causing her to nearly crash head-on into a nearby tree.

"Ahhh!"

She screamed in fright as she fell back down, waiting in apprehension for the onset of pain the moment she crashed back onto the ground. However, her flailing arms, in a moment of panic, ended up creating a strong wind beneath her instead, which gently placed her back to the ground.

"T-this..." Wei Ruyan widened her eyes in shock, dumbstruck by the changes in her body.

Due to her affliction, despite her father being a Saint realm expert, she had never cultivated for a single day in her life.

But... to be able to fly into the air with a light push and land softly just by flailing her arms, it was clear that she possessed strength beyond that of an ordinary mortal...

What was happening?

Seeing the look of confusion on the other party's face, Zhang Xuan explained with a smile, "You have consumed many precious medicinal herbs over the years, and even though they didn't do your affliction any good, their medicinal properties are starting to work their magic now that your body has

recovered. At the moment, you already possess strength comparable to a Chrysalis realm pinnacle cultivator!”

In order to save his daughter, Wei Changfeng had fed her all kinds of precious medicinal herbs, and on top of that, Wei Ruyan had also consumed the nearly grade-8 Grand Intermittence Pill just some time ago. As a result, despite having never cultivated for a single day in her life, her body still harnessed immense power comparable to a Chrysalis realm expert!

If one were to take into consideration her double unique constitutions as well, she was definitely on par with an average Half-Saint!

However, having never cultivated any cultivation technique or battle technique in her life, she didn't know how to utilize her newfound strength.

“Chrysalis realm pinnacle?” Wei Ruyan was stunned.

Suffering from such a severe affliction from a very young age, the greatest wish she had was to be granted an ordinary life. She had never dared hope that she would be able to cultivate and harness such great strength.

But now... everything suddenly came to her at once!

“Zhang shi, thank you for saving my life!” Knowing that it was the young man before her who had granted her this second life, Wei Ruyan kneeled to the floor without any hesitation.

“Please rise!” Zhang Xuan stepped forward to help her up.

“Yes!” Standing up, Wei Ruyan began scanning her surroundings, and noticing the lack of a familiar figure, she asked, “Zhang shi, where is my father? Does he know of my recovery?”

She had seen the extent her father had gone to for her, so in her moment of recovery, the very first person she wanted to share the news with was him.

If her father found out that she had recovered and could even cultivate, he would probably immediately leap in joy.

Just by thinking about how her father would react to the news, Wei Ruyan's eyes couldn't help but curl into crescents, and her lips inched up into a sweet smile.

For many years, the both of them had relied on one another for support, creating an exceptional connection between them.

"Wei Changfeng..." Seeing the expectant gleam in the other party's eyes, Zhang Xuan had no idea how he should break the news.

Noticing that something was amiss with Zhang Shi's expression, an ominous premonition surfaced in Wei Ruyan's heart, and she asked anxiously, "What about my father?"

"He has departed from this world."

Shaking his head, Zhang Xuan sighed. As cruel as it was, this was the truth. Wei Ruyan would have to face it one day.

"Departed...?" Wei Ruyan's face froze before slowly paling. Her body staggered weakly, and she shook her head in disbelief.

For as long as she could remember, her father had always been by her side. He told her bedtime stories and accompanied her during her treatment. No matter what her request was, he would always give in to her so as to make her happy. She had thought that she would leave this world ahead of him, but who would have thought that... this would be the very first thing she would hear after her awakening!

"Ruyan, you must live on. No matter the price, I will definitely save you!"

"Be good and take your medicine, it will help you recover..."

"You are my beloved daughter. I am willing to give you everything in the world, including my life..."

...

Those words still echoed clearly in her ears, but the person who had said them had already disappeared...

Time and time again, he had begged physicians to treat her. Time and time again, he had ventured into dangerous lands to

seek rare herbs for her affliction...

There were innumerable memories of her traveling on her father's back, going around to seek others for help. But now that she had finally recovered, her father was no longer around to see it...

Father...

Wei Ruyan's eyes reddened as her vision was blurred by the tears streaming down her cheeks. Amid sobs, she turned to Zhang Xuan and asked hoarsely, "How did my father die?"

"He died while trying to save you..."

Without hiding anything, Zhang Xuan told her everything that had happened.

This included the affair with the Ten-leafed Flower, You Xu's scheme, and Wei Changfeng venturing into the depths of the Cloudmist Ridge alone...

Hearing that her father had trudged on, despite having sustained heavy injuries, in order to obtain the Cloudmist Flower to save her, Wei Ruyan clenched her fists tightly, and her skinny figure began to tremble uncontrollably.

"Father..." she muttered weakly.

A father's love was greater than a mountain, and no words or actions could possibly repay those sentiments.

She had intended to use her entire life to repay the favor, but it was impossible now...

Taking a deep breath, Wei Ruyan seemed to have come to a decision, and her knees fell to the ground.

"Zhang shi, please accept me as your student!"

Since her father had lost his life in exchange for hers, she would have to live well so that her father's soul would be consoled as he watched her from above.

Zhang Xuan nodded. "Alright, I will accept you. From today on, you will be my student."

From the moment he promised Wei Changfeng to take care of his daughter, he had already decided to take Wei Ruyan in as his student.

“Student Wei Ruyan pays respect to Zhang laoshi!” Kneeling on the ground, Wei Ruyan kowtowed grandly several times in order to complete the acknowledgement ceremony.

Knowing that this was the tradition, Zhang Xuan accepted her kowtows.

After acknowledging Zhang Xuan, Wei Ruyan stood up and asked through clenched teeth, “Teacher, may I know where the culprit behind my father’s death, You Xu, is?”

Years of fighting against her affliction had made her mind exceptionally strong despite her young age. Her mental fortitude was at least on par with Lu Chong, if not surpassing him.

Since You Xu was the culprit behind her father’s death, she was determined to make him pay the price, regardless of whether he was a master teacher and the vice head of the Physician School or not!

Understanding Wei Ruyan’s emotions, Zhang Xuan nodded. “I knew that you would surely want to exact vengeance for your father, so I have already detained him.

“Follow me!”

After saying these words, Zhang Xuan informed one of the guards to bid Yu Shenqing farewell in his stead. After which, he summoned the Byzantium Helios Beast, and the duo got on it and headed back to his manor.

Upon reaching his manor, Zhang Xuan had Sun Qiang bring the imprisoned You Xu over.

At this moment, You Xu had his cultivation sealed, and he no longer bore any resemblance to the majestic vice school head he used to be. In just half a month, he had grown so thin that he was barely even skin and bones, and he looked like he had aged a decade.

“This is the culprit behind your father’s death. I will leave him for you to deal with.” Knowing that Wei Ruyan would want to vent her anger and frustration, Zhang Xuan waved his hands before heading out, closing the door behind him.

If she wanted to exact vengeance for her father, she should do it with her own hands. He, Zhang Xuan, would never accept a weak-minded person as his disciple!

890 The Reason Behind the Old Principal's Death

Returning to his room, Zhang Xuan finally felt exhaustion setting into his body.

It had been two days since he returned from the search for the Firefly Fruit, and he hadn't had a single moment of rest. On top of that, becoming the master of the many spirit beasts and saint beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge had caused him to overexert his spirit as well.

Were it not for his massive soul, he would have never been able to hold on. Nevertheless, as soon as the tension left his body, he felt a splitting headache striking his mind.

Before Vicious fell into a temporary coma, he helped me tamper with the soul of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast to remove its consciousness. I can use that to heal my wounded soul. Exhaling deeply, Zhang Xuan whipped out the soul of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast before drawing his own soul out as well.

Driving the Heaven's Path Soul Art, he began to devour the soul before his eyes.

Tzzzzz!

The pure soul of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast gushed into Zhang Xuan's soul in the form of a warm surge of energy, healing and tempering it further.

Not too long later, Zhang Xuan's soul was fully recovered. On top of that, it had also become slightly bigger and stronger.

As the Bluehorn Dragon Beast's soul was lacking a portion, it couldn't be said to be complete. Nevertheless, it was still a soul that had reached Saint realm 5-dan, so in terms of the purity of its energy, even a high-tier spirit stone would be no match for it.

It's truly a pity that I don't have the complete Chrysalis realm Heaven's Path Soul Art yet... or else, I would have been able to raise my soul cultivation further!

After consuming a portion of the Bluehorn Dragon Beast's soul and feeling his soul being filled to the brim, Zhang Xuan could only shake his head and put it back.

He only had the Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Heaven's Path Soul Art at the moment, so there was no way for him to advance his cultivation any further.

Of course, he could choose to absorb the soul to enhance the quantity of his soul instead of the quality, but if he were to do so, it was possible that the awkward situation that had befallen him back in the Cleansing Lake might occur once more. If his soul and body were to become incompatible once more, not only would his fighting prowess not increase, it might decline instead.

It's a pity that the Cloudmist Ridge is dominated by saint beasts, so there are no human cultivation techniques here. Otherwise, I could have tried to gather books, compile a complete Heaven's Path Divine Art, and attempt a breakthrough to Half-Saint tonight...

There were all kinds of treasures in the Golden Beartiger Beast's storage ring, but there was simply a certain item lacking—cultivation technique manuals.

Spirit beasts and saint beasts cultivated in a vastly different manner from humans, so the cultivation techniques of humans were useless to the Golden Beartiger Beast, thus he didn't leave any behind.

Otherwise, given that there was still some time before daylight, he could have attempted to break through to Half-Saint realm.

Sighing deeply, Zhang Xuan thought, Forget it. It will be the inauguration ceremony in a few hours' time, and once I become the principal, I will be able to access all of the books in the academy freely. By then, I can easily gather all of the

cultivation technique manuals that I am lacking together and form the corresponding Heaven's Path Divine Art...

If it had been before, Zhang Xuan would surely have begun searching around to see if he could find any cultivation techniques. However, considering that he would be able to access all of the books in the academy tomorrow, there was no need for him to go through that trouble anymore.

"Teacher!" Just as Zhang Xuan was about to rest, he suddenly heard Wei Ruyan's voice from beyond the window.

Frowning, Zhang Xuan walked over. "What's wrong?"

Wasn't she going to exact vengeance for her father? Did she get soft-hearted at the last moment?

"Teacher, You Xu revealed some important news regarding the Master Teacher Academy right before I was going to kill him, so I dare not make a decision by myself. Thus, I came over here to report the matter to you!" Wei Ruyan said.

"What is it?" Zhang Xuan frowned.

From the very start, Zhang Xuan had already felt that there was something amiss with You Xu, and this feeling only intensified after the incident regarding the Bodhi Saint Tree's poisoning.

However, since You Xu was Wei Ruyan's enemy, he still decided to leave the other party to her in the end. He really hadn't thought that she would be able to get vital information out of him.

"It seems to be regarding the true reason behind the old principal's death," Wei Ruyan said with a grim expression. "However, he was unwilling to go into details regarding the matter, and he demanded to meet Teacher instead."

"Un, noted." Zhang Xuan nodded. Just as he was about to walk out, he hesitated for a moment before bringing the Byzantium Helios Beast out.

The Byzantium Helios Beast was the tamed beast of the old principal, and he was known to be extremely loyal to the latter

as well. Since this matter concerned the death of the old principal, he had the right to listen to it as well.

Thus, the three of them headed for the residence where You Xu was.

When they entered, You Xu's face was extremely pale, and his body was shaking uncontrollably.

"You poisoned him?" Seeing the other party's state, Zhang Xuan's eyebrows shot up.

As an expert on poison himself, he could instantly tell this reaction wasn't just due to You Xu's fear but the lethal poison coursing through his body as well.

Wei Ruyan possessed the Innate Poison Body and the Poison Soul Constitution. Killing a master teacher who had his cultivation sealed was an extremely easy feat for her.

"That's right," Wei Ruyan admitted.

She wasn't very aware about her unique constitution, but she had known from a young age that her body was capable of producing lethal poison.

Since this fellow was the culprit behind her father's death, she wasn't willing to let him off the hook easily. She wanted him to suffer for his actions first.

Just that, she didn't think that he would succumb so easily and reveal secrets that were beyond her imagination. Thus, she swiftly rushed out to find her teacher to deal with this matter.

Fearing that her teacher would reprimand her, Wei Ruyan said timidly, "Have I done... wrong? I won't do it again!"

"It's fine this time, but you aren't to use such a method on anyone else!" Zhang Xuan said with a frown.

Wei Changfeng was the only kin that Wei Ruyan had, and he had been her mental support for over many years. Fearing that Wei Ruyan might crumble under the loss of her loved one, Zhang Xuan had chosen to leave You Xu to her so as to allow her to vent all of her unpleasant emotions and give her closure for this matter.

Nevertheless, there was still a need to instill the correct values in her, especially since she was still young.

Driving his zhenqi, Zhang Xuan began speaking with the Impartation of Heaven's Will infused in his words. "Vice School Head You Xu, we meet once more. Since I am here, you can start speaking. What happened to the old principal?"

His current Soul Depth was at 21.1, which was on par with 7-star master teachers. On top of that, he also possessed the Heart of a Teacher. With his means, he could easily make the mentally unstable You Xu reveal everything obediently.

With his eyes glazed, You Xu began to speak. "It was truly a moment of foolishness!

"Two years ago, the old principal gathered all of the elders in the academy and revealed that he had discovered an ancient domain, and there was a high chance that a great secret was concealed within it, so it had to be explored. Thus, after some discussion, it was decided that I, along with the old principal and twenty other elders, would set forth for the ancient domain.

"But who knew that we would encounter a spatial storm not too long after entering the ancient domain, scattering our group. Out of sheer misfortune, I fell into a folded space and was captured by the Otherworldly Demons...

"They gave me a bottle of poison and forced me to feed it to the old principal and the other members of the expedition...

"I really had no intention of harming them at all, but they had placed an extremely formidable curse on me, leaving me with no choice but to obey them..." You Xu confessed as he began wailing sorrowfully.

"Is it the same poison that you used against me in the Life-and-Death Physician Duel?" Zhang Xuan asked with an awful complexion.

"That's right!" You Xu nodded.

"You scoundrel!" With his teeth clenched so tightly that a screeching sound echoed clearly in the room, the Byzantium

Helios Beast's eyes reddened, and its massive body trembled intensely out of fury.

His old master had treated You Xu so well, but to think that the latter would be so callous as to poison him!

If not for this scoundrel before him, even if the expedition had met with some kind of danger in the ancient domain, they couldn't possibly have been wiped out completely!

“As a master teacher, instead of protecting your own kind, you chose to side with the Otherworldly Demons and aid them in harming your own brethren. How can you find the courage to remain living in this world?” Zhang Xuan's eyes narrowed menacingly.

He had tried the poison out himself, and if one had no means to neutralize it, even a Saint realm 1-dan expert would be killed in just a few moments.

The old principal possessed exceptional fighting prowess, but to fall under that scoundrel's poison and be surrounded by the Otherworldly Demons shortly after, how could he possibly survive?

It could be said that You Xu was truly the scum of humanity, the shame of the master teachers!

“Are you the one behind the poisoning of the royal family's Bodhi Saint Tree as well?” Zhang Xuan continued the interrogation.

“Yes.” You Xu nodded.

“Why?”

The Bodhi Saint Tree was only something used by the royal family to nurture their souls, and it should have had nothing to do with the Otherworldly Demons. Why would he have to go to the effort of poisoning it?

“I am not too sure about the exact reason myself either; I simply did what they ordered me to do. They said that, as long as I accomplished this mission, they would use their secret means to lengthen my lifespan by an additional fifty years,” You Xu confessed.

Under the effects of the lethal poison coursing through his body, his mind was already on the verge of collapse. As such, he was unable to put up any resistance against Zhang Xuan's Impartation of Heaven's Will, so he quickly revealed everything he knew.

The closer one's life inched toward the end, the more desperately one would clutch on to life. You Xu was no exception to the rule. With the Otherworldly Demon's promise to lengthen his lifespan, along with all of the threats they had made, he eventually gave in to them.

Deep in his heart, he knew that this was the wrong move to make, but with a precedent made, it wasn't that difficult to take the second step. Before long, he found himself at a distance too far away to turn back.

As for information regarding the ancient domain that they had gone to, as You Xu had been captured by the Otherworldly Demons right after he entered, he couldn't say for sure what the secrets it held were either.

The same went for poisoning the Bodhi Saint Tree. He was only a puppet used by the Otherworldly Demons, so he wasn't qualified to learn of their true plans.

After the interrogation finally came to an end, the Byzantium Helios Beast gritted his teeth and said, "Master, can you leave this scum to me to deal with?"

Zhang Xuan waved his hands and said, "His crimes definitely warrants death, but this matter is too great for us to pass judgment on ourselves. I will have Mu shi take him back to the headquarters to investigate this matter. Don't worry, the Master Teacher Pavilion will never be lenient with traitors. He will suffer a death far more gruesome than we can imagine!"

If You Xu had only caused Wei Changfeng's death, given Zhang Xuan's standing as the succeeding principal of the academy and the victor of the Life-and-Death Physician Duel, he had the right and the authority to deal with You Xu as he liked. However, given that You Xu was involved in the death of the old principal and the schemes of the Otherworldly

Demons, this matter had already exceeded their jurisdiction. They couldn't just kill him that easily anymore.

The headquarters had to be informed of this matter so that they could investigate further.

After a moment of hesitation, the Byzantium Helios Beast nodded reluctantly. "... Alright!"

He wanted to kill that fellow badly, but as the tamed beast of the old principal, he had a rough grasp of the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion as well. In any case, death could be considered a mercy to that traitor.

Delivering him to the headquarters to be tried and punished so that he would permanently bear the shame on his name would be greatest punishment to him.

Zhang Xuan turned to Wei Ruyan. "What about you?"

"I will follow teacher's arrangements." Wei Ruyan nodded.

"Good." Zhang Xuan patted Wei Ruyan's back. "Alright, I will call Mu shi over now."

After which, he called Sun Qiang over and issued some instructions to him.

Less than ten minutes later, Mu shi descended in the courtyard of the manor.

Upon seeing Zhang Xuan, Mu shi clasped his fist and greeted respectfully, "Senior Uncle!"

Zhang Xuan gestured to the feeble-looking old man beside him and said, "Mu shi! After some investigation, I have found that You Xu has betrayed mankind. He colluded with the Otherworldly Demons to bring about the death of the old principal and the entire expedition that went with them to the ancient domain. I hope that you can take him back to the headquarters to be tried!"

"Betrayed humanity?" Mu shi narrowed his eyes in alarm.

"Senior Uncle, are you certain?"

This was an extremely grave sin to bear, especially for a master teacher. Once confirmed, it would ruin one's life and

make one the scorn of humanity.

“I am certain!” Zhang Xuan nodded.

“I see. I will make preparations then!”

Knowing how grave this matter was, Mu shi waved his hand and bound You Xu with his zhenqi. Carrying the latter with his zhenqi, he said, “I will take him back to the headquarters right now. Pardon me, I don’t think that I will be able to make it to Senior Uncle’s inauguration ceremony anymore...”

Since Zhang Xuan’s role as the Master Teacher Academy’s principal was already agreed upon by him and the Ten Great Master Teachers, the inauguration ceremony could be considered nothing more than a formality. It didn’t matter whether he participated in it or not.

It was more important for him to take the traitor of humanity back to the headquarters to be judged.

“It’s fine, go ahead!” Zhang Xuan waved his hands.

Responding with a nod, Mu shi leaped up, and before long, he disappeared into the night sky.

891 The Four Emperors

Back in the Hongyuan royal palace...

After Zhang Xuan left, Yu Shenqing hurried to the residence where the Bodhi Saint Tree was and checked the surroundings. After confirming that there was no damage whatsoever, he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

The succeeding Principal Zhang was an outstanding man, possessing superior talent in cultivation, exceptional proficiency in his supporting occupations, amazing eye of discernment, and an upright character... But if one had to point out a flaw with that seemingly perfect man, it would be that he simply loved to cause destruction wherever he went.

Every time the other party paid the royal palace a visit, he would feel his heart beating swiftly in apprehension, fearing that the other party would tear the entire place down.

In truth, he was rather surprised when the other party managed to cure the Bodhi Saint Tree without tearing anything down the previous time.

“Your Majesty!” Shortly after Yu Shenqing returned to the imperial study, the old eunuch, Luo Fu, walked in.

“Un. What is the situation at the Cloudmist Ridge?” Yu Shenqing asked.

Considering the huge fuss at the Cloudmist Ridge, he, as the emperor of Hongyuan Empire, had been keeping an eye on it so that he could prepare swift countermeasures should the situation deteriorate. In fact, he had even commanded for all of the soldiers that could be mobilized in Hongyuan City to stand on guard so that they would be ready to move whenever the situation called for it.

Luo Fu clasped his fist and answered, “Reporting to Your Majesty, the battle between the Cloudmist Ridge and the Master Teacher Academy has already ceased!”

“The battle has ceased?” Yu Shenqing frowned.

Both sides had still been engaged in an intense battle earlier in the morning, neither side willing to give in to the other. How did the battle end so abruptly?

“School Head Mo personally went into the Cloudmist Ridge to negotiate with the enemy’s kings, and shortly afterward, the battle halted,” Luo Fu reported.

On the way to the Cloudmist Ridge, Zhang Xuan had been atop the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast all along, so no one except for the school heads and Mu Shi knew that he was there.

“Negotiate?” A deep frown surfaced on Yu Shenqing’s face. “Who was the one who proposed it?”

Proposing a negotiation was not any different from admitting defeat, and the side to propose it would be instantly placed in a disadvantageous position in the negotiations.

“The Master Teacher Academy was the one to propose the negotiation!” Luo Fu replied.

“The academy?” Yu Shenqing was taken aback.

The respected Master Teacher Academy admitted defeat to a bunch of beasts?

And School Head Mo had entered enemy grounds personally to conduct the negotiation on top of that?

This was... a little difficult to swallow...

“That’s right. As the negotiation was conducted in the Cloudmist Ridge, our sources aren’t able to get any concrete news on the outcome of the negotiation. However, earlier in the afternoon, the spirit beasts battling with the Master Teacher Academy withdrew from the battlefield!” Luo Fu said.

Most beasts were hostile toward humans, and the Cloudmist Ridge could be considered an embodiment of that trait. Even the elite scouts from the Hongyuan royal family were unable to obtain any intelligence from there.

After a moment of thought, Yu Shenqing nodded in realization. “They are probably making this compromise for

the inauguration ceremony tomorrow.”

The inauguration ceremony would begin at dawn, and even though the invitation letters had been delivered in a rush, most of the neighboring powers, especially the many Tier-1 Empires, would still send a representative over to attend the ceremony. If they were to witness a huge war between the Cloudmist Ridge and the humans instead, they might lose confidence in the capability of the succeeding principal.

“That is probably the case. I have already sent our scouts to infiltrate the Cloudmist Ridge to look into the results of the negotiation. The scouts should be able to get back to us before the inauguration ceremony!” Luo Fu said.

“Good!” Yu Shenqing nodded. Just as he was about to continue, a young eunuch abruptly rushed into the room.

The young eunuch swiftly kneeled onto the floor and greeted, “Your Majesty!”

“What happened?” Yu Shenqing frowned.

Given that the young eunuch had barged in so abruptly in the middle of the night, it was very likely that it was a matter of grave importance.

“The emperors of Tier-1 Empires Hongchi, Yuanjiang, Baituo, and Chiyao have arrived, and they are currently waiting in the Harmonious Heaven Hall!” the young eunuch reported.

“They have arrived? They sure are fast!” Yu Shenqing was taken aback for a moment before getting to his feet. “Let’s head over to take a look!”

Even though the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy bore the name of Hongyuan Empire, its students encompassed master teachers from the surrounding Tier-1 Empires.

Hongchi, Yuanjiang, Baituo, and Chiyao were the four closest empires to Hongyuan Empire.

Upon hearing that a new principal was going to be inaugurated, their empires’ leaders swiftly rushed over as a show of respect to him.

Walking into the Harmonious Heaven Hall, Yu Shenqing saw four middle-aged men sitting on the guest seats. A majestic aura seemed to linger around them, and with just a look, it was clear that each of them possessed exceptional strength.

To be able to become the monarch of a Tier-1 Empire, their cultivation must have at least reached Saint 1-dan pinnacle.

“Brother Zhu, Brother Han, Brother Shen, Brother Nie!” Yu Shenqing greeted them one by one. “It must have been tiring for you to rush over here in just three days!”

Even though their empires were located closest to Hongyuan Empire, it still must have been quite a rush for them to make it in less than three days.

“How can we be absent for the inauguration of the new principal?”

“The Master Teacher Academy is the foundation that ensures peace in the dozen Tier-1 Empires in the region. Given that a new leader is going to be inaugurated, we definitely had to make it on time for the ceremony, even if we did have to travel through the night!”

“It has been two years since the disappearance of the old principal. I am curious to see what the new principal will be like!”

...

The middle-aged men chuckled politely.

Each of these men wielded indisputable power in their own territories, but before the Master Teacher Academy, they still dared not pull their weight.

As soon as they received the invitation letter, they had swiftly put aside all of their work and rushed over.

After trading some pleasantries, one of the middle-aged men asked, “Oh right, I nearly forgot. I rushed here as soon as I received the letter, so even now, I still don’t know who the new principal is. May I know who it will be? Is it School Head Zhao Bingxu or School Head Lu Feng?”

It was the emperor of Tier-1 Hongchi Empire, Zhu Yi.

After hearing his words, the others swiftly turned their gazes toward Yu Shenqing as well. In truth, the reason they had headed to the royal palace in the middle of the night, as soon as they arrived in Hongyuan City, was to find out who the succeeding principal would be so that they could prepare suitable gifts in advance.

Otherwise, if they were to end up giving, say, the head of the Blacksmith School some medicinal herbs, they might end up leaving a bad impression instead.

Hearing their guesses, a bitter smile surfaced on Yu Shenqing's lips, and he shook his head. "It is neither of them!"

Just like them, he had thought that the succeeding principal would surely be one of those two. But the outcome sure was unexpected...

"It is neither of them?"

The four emperors were stunned as they traded confused glances with one another. Zhu Yi clasped his fist once more and asked, "Then, may I ask Brother Yu to tell us which elder it will be so that we can make preparations in advance?"

"This..." Yu Shenqing hesitated.

It was not without reason that the identity of the succeeding principal had been kept a secret thus far. It was only through pulling some strings that he had managed to uncover it in advance, so he was unsure whether or not it was appropriate for him to reveal it.

One of the middle-aged men frowned. "What? The identity of the principal will be uncovered in the inauguration ceremony tomorrow; is Brother Yu unwilling to let us know just a few hours in advance?"

Yu Shenqing shook his head. "It's not that, but there is a reason the Master Teacher Academy chose not to reveal the identity of the succeeding principal in advance... It would be disrespectful of me to disregard the Master Teacher Academy and reveal it in advance..."

"It seems like Brother Yu doesn't trust us then! Just like you, the fates of our empires are also tied closely with the Master

Teacher Academy. Since we are in the same plight, do you think that we will be so foolish as to leak the news to others easily?” Zhu Yi frowned in displeasure. “We only want to know it so that we can prepare some gifts in advance!”

“This... Alright then!”

Knowing that he would only gain the ire of the others if he were to continue attempting to conceal the identity of the succeeding principal, Yu Shenqing eventually relented with a nod. “This is a confidential secret of the academy, so I hope that you can remain silent about the matter before the inauguration ceremony!”

Since those present were emperors themselves, they should understand the possible implications that could come from the leakage of crucial intelligence. If some mishap were to occur to the succeeding principal, the Master Teacher Pavilion would surely investigate the matter and severely punish the ones responsible for leaking the confidential information.

As unlikely as it was, Yu Shenqing still felt that it was imperative for him to warn them sternly in advance.

“Don’t worry about this!”

“How many years have we known each other? We aren’t that kind of men!”

The others all replied sincerely.

With a slight wave of his hand, the confidential formation in the hall was activated, and Yu Shenqing informed them through zhenqi telepathy. “Alright. Based on the intelligence I received, the succeeding principal is Zhang Xuan!”

The four emperors glanced at one another in confusion.

“Zhang Xuan?”

They knew the names of the Ten Great Master Teachers, and they had even met most of them before. But Zhang Xuan... this name was extremely unfamiliar to them.

Zhu Yi couldn’t help but ask, “Is Zhang shi from the headquarters?”

The others were also thinking the same thing as well.

The Master Teacher Academy shouldered the heavy responsibility of grooming young master teachers, who would eventually become the future of mankind. It was impossible for a nobody without any credentials or outstanding capability to become the leader of such a vital organization.

Since they had never heard of the name 'Zhang Xuan' before, it was highly likely that the other party might have come from the headquarters.

But... didn't the headquarters usually stay out of the affairs of the branches wherever possible?

Why would they suddenly dispatch a master teacher here and even appoint him as the principal?

Seeing the confusion in everyone's eyes, Yu Shenqing hurriedly explained, "This... He isn't from the headquarters, and he isn't an elder of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy either. He is... a freshman who enrolled into the academy just this year!"

"Freshman?"

"You are saying that a freshman who has just enrolled into the academy... is going to become its principal?"

Hearing that revelation, the four emperors froze in place, struck dumb by what they had just heard.

The Master Teacher Academy is a pillar of support of mankind and an inviolable existence in everyone's heart... Yet, a newly-enrolled freshman is going to become its principal?

You must be freaking kidding me!

"I know it's hard for you to accept this news all of the sudden, but this is the truth!" Yu Shenqing said with a conflicted expression.

He had hardly believed it himself when he first heard the news.

But after witnessing the many incredible means that Zhang Shi possessed, he couldn't help but feel awed by Mu Shi and the

others' decisiveness and keen insight.

After a moment of silence, one of the middle-aged men asked, "What is Zhang Shi's background?"

"Zhang Shi is twenty this year, and he is currently a 4-star master teacher. Despite his young age, he has achieved a proficiency of 6-star for blacksmith, apothecary, physician, demonic tunist, and terpsichore. At the same time, he has shown exceptional prowess in the fields of beast taming, formations, and herbology as well. He is truly an outstanding genius that very few in history can rival!" Yu Shenqing said.

The four monarchs of the Tier-1 Empires all exclaimed lividly.

"He has five 6-star supporting occupations? But even if he has that many supporting occupations, he is still a 4-star master teacher. What right does he have to become the principal?"

"Indeed! This world has no lack of talents! As long as he doesn't possess the corresponding capability required, I don't think that he is qualified to become the principal of the Master Teacher Academy!"

"I heard rumors on my way here that, for the inauguration ceremony tomorrow, the Master Teacher Academy went to the extent of lowering itself to negotiate with the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge! Don't you think that the culture in the Master Teacher Academy has been slowly veering down the wrong path ever since the disappearance of the old principal?"

"I have also heard of the matter as well. How could the respected Master Teacher Academy stoop to the level of negotiating with beasts? This is preposterous! Now, they are even nominating a 4-star master teacher to be their principal... Just how low are they going to fall?"

They had heard about the battle between the Master Teacher Academy and the Cloudmist Ridge, and rumor had it that it was the Master Teacher Academy who had proposed the negotiations.

They had thought that just those rumors were already ridiculous, but to think that something even more ridiculous was awaiting them!

To nominate an immature twenty-year-old brat as the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy...

Just what were they thinking when they made such a decision?

Facing the vehement disapproval of the four emperors, Yu Shenqing had no idea how he should respond.

They had only heard Zhang shi's age and master teacher rank, so it was natural that they reacted in such a manner. One had to meet him in person to realize how incredible he was.

The several emperors stood up and declared their dissatisfaction furiously.

“We must definitely get to the bottom of this matter. Otherwise, our Hongchi Empire will never acknowledge Zhang shi as the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy!”

“Our Yuanjiang Empire also won't acknowledge Zhang shi as the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy!”

“Our Baituo Empire as well...”

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While these empires didn't have any say in deciding the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy, they did have a vote of confidence. If it was found that there was an overwhelming lack of trust in the succeeding principal, they could launch a formal petition to the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters to look into this matter.

After all, the operation of the Master Teacher Academy was largely financed by the surrounding Tier-1 Empires.

The surrounding empires would often donate large sums of money to the Master Teacher Academy each year for their operations, and in exchange, the Master Teacher Academy would nurture their master teachers, thus bringing their national power to greater heights. An incapable principal could render their investment futile, and this was something that they weren't willing to see.

If there was widespread distrust in the capability of the principal, even the headquarters would have no choice but to reconsider the matter.

As the saying goes, 'the higher one stands, the greater the fall'. As powerful as the Master Teacher Pavilion was, they still had to maintain friendly ties with the surrounding nations. Otherwise, if it were to lose the support of the people, it would fall into decline, and the moment it showed a sign of vulnerability, the others would rush to push it over.

...

A similar sight was occurring in the Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion as well.

Facing a large group of displeased pavilion masters, Mo Gaoyuan rubbed his glabella in frustration, not knowing how he should deal with the situation.

Since even the emperors of Hongchi, Yuanjiang, Baituo, and Chiyao had arrived, their corresponding Master Teacher Pavilion branches had also dispatched representatives.

Three pavilion masters and one vice pavilion master!

Upon hearing that the Master Teacher Academy would be inaugurating a 4-star master teacher as its principal, a huge commotion broke out amid the crowd.

As representatives of the Master Teacher Pavilions of Tier-1 Empires, their standing was equivalent to Mo Gaoyuan and the Ten Great Master Teachers, so they were qualified to question their judgement.

“Regardless of how capable the newly-appointed principal is, I object to this decision! Just watch how I make things difficult for him in the ‘Question Symposium’!”

“How arrogant must a mere 4-star master teacher be to dream of becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy? He sure is taking all of us lightly!”

“Hah, if it was so easy to become the principal, the seat wouldn’t have been empty for a whole two years!”

...

The several pavilion masters spoke with a cold glint in their eyes.

As esteemed master teachers themselves, they would be lying if they said that they harbored no intentions of becoming the principal themselves. If it had been a respected and capable master teacher who rose to the position, there would be nothing they could say about it. But a mere twenty-year-old 4-star master teacher... How could they possibly not oppose it?

...

In the Master Teacher Academy, many wounded students were gathered together with their faces livid with rage.

Peng!

Amongst them, a Grade-4 student abruptly slammed his palm forcefully on a table.

“How could the Master Teacher Academy actually admit defeat to a bunch of beasts? This is a huge humiliation to us as master teachers!”

“I heard that the elders just want to settle the conflict ahead of the inauguration ceremony, or else it might reflect badly on them.”

“Preposterous! Are we going to toss aside the pride of mankind just for the pride of the new principal?”

“This is truly a huge disgrace to all master teachers! I would rather have died on the battlefield than attend this shameful inauguration ceremony!”

“As master teachers, we shoulder the fate of mankind. Yet, for the sake of their own pride, they actually chose to negotiate with those beasts. This is truly reprehensible!”

...

Rage was burning in the hearts of each and every student gathered there.

Busy with the inauguration ceremony, the school heads had chosen to conceal this matter from the students for the time being until everything settled down. As such, most of the students involved in the battle were unaware that the saint beasts and spirit beasts had already submitted to Zhang Xuan. They thought that the school heads had decided to surrender so that the inauguration ceremony could proceed smoothly.

Otherwise, considering how furiously the spirit beasts had bared their fangs at them, seemingly unwilling to rest until they had torn every human in sight into shreds, how could they willingly retreat from the battlefield?

“Right, do you know who the next principal is?” someone amid the crowd asked.

A couple of students shook their heads and replied, “I am not too sure!”

The Master Teacher Academy had kept a tight lid on this information, so not even they, as students, were aware of the identity of the succeeding principal.

“Who cares who the next principal is? This is very first time that the academy has lowered its head to mere beasts since its establishment. A person like him is unworthy of respect! Why don’t we start a protest at the inauguration ceremony tomorrow to force the succeeding principal to confess what kind of humiliating terms he had to agree to?” one person proposed.

“That’s a good idea! It’s settled then! I also want to know what kind of benefits he has promised those beasts for them to obediently return to the Cloudmist Ridge!”

Even though the students had no idea who the next principal was, they were devoid of the slightest goodwill toward him due to this incident.

...

Oblivious to the fact that he had just won himself the hostility of countless men, at this very moment, Zhang Xuan was teaching Wei Ruyan suitable cultivation techniques for her constitution. By the time that was done, a new day had already set in.

Stretching lazily, Zhang Xuan was just about to have his breakfast when School Head Mo suddenly arrived at his manor.

“Principal Zhang, this is the flow of events for the inauguration ceremony later on. Take a look at it and familiarize yourself with it,” School Head Mo said as he passed Zhang Xuan a jade token filled with words.

Taking a look at it, Zhang Xuan’s eyebrows shot up.

The inauguration ceremony was indeed not as easy as he had thought. He would first be challenged by all of the teachers and students in the Question Symposium, after which he would have to pay respects to the many predecessors of the academy and seek their acknowledgement, and only then would he be able to gather the will of the teachers and students

of the academy to form the Principal's Seal and become the true principal of the academy.

Last but not least, he would have to conduct a public lecture.

Each of these events was extremely troublesome, and the inauguration ceremony would take half a day at the very least.

But of course, considering that he was going to become the principal of the Master Teacher Academy that protected the surrounding dozen Tier-1 Empires, if he didn't go through this much, it would be hard for him to win the support of the masses.

Noting Principal Zhang's silence, School Head Mo feared that he might be unfamiliar with some of the procedures, so he began explaining them. "The Question Symposium is a challenge from the academy's teachers and students to the succeeding principal. As long as you perform well, you should be able to increase your recognition level. Typically speaking, the questions will be posed by a representative of the students, a representative of the teachers, and a representative of the other Master Teacher Pavilions, and they will be concerning cultivation or supporting occupations. Considering the deep knowledge that Zhang shi possesses, it shouldn't pose a problem at all!"

Given how even Principal Zhang's students were able to conduct a lecture that could leave all listeners in a trance, little had to be said about the teacher's capability.

In truth, the Question Symposium served as a platform for the new principal to showcase his capability and win the support of the masses.

"As for paying respects to the predecessors, considering Principal Zhang's astounding talent, even though you aren't a 6-star master teacher yet, you already have six 6-star supporting occupations, so it is only a matter of time before you clear the examination. Thus, it shouldn't be a problem for you to win their acknowledgement.

"Last but not least, gathering the wills of the teachers and students in order to form the Principal's Seal is, on the

contrary, the most difficult aspect of the entire ceremony. No matter how formidable a master teacher is, it is impossible to obtain everyone's recognition. It is inevitable that there would be those who object to your inauguration as the principal. Despite the incredible prestige that the old principal wielded prior to his inauguration, he still only managed to form the Golden Principal's Seal."

"Golden Principal's Seal?" Zhang Xuan asked with a frown.

"Un. The more teachers and students who recognize you as their principal, the more wills you will be able to gather, and the higher the tier of the Principal's Seal formed from them will be. Typically speaking, it can be divided into four tiers, Platinum, Golden, Copper, and Iron!" School Head Mo explained.

"To form the Copper Principal's Seal, one will require the earnest recognition from half of the entire academy's populace. As for the Golden Principal's Seal, one will require sixty percent recognition level, and the Platinum Principal's Seal will require seventy percent. Ever since the founding of the Master Teacher Academy more than ten thousand years ago, only two principals have managed to form the Platinum Principal's Seal!

"One of them was the founder of our Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Mu Kai! Mu shi was an earnest man who viewed every student as his own child. Back then, when a devastating war broke out, he charged to the frontlines and led the students bravely, suffering more than 130 deep cuts in that battle. After which, he even emptied out his entire fortune to treat the students wounded in the battle... It was such a sincere heart that won him the recognition of most students in the academy!

"The other one to achieve that feat was Principal Mo Liuzhen four thousand years ago. Principal Mo was truly an incredible talent who dominated his era, and the accomplishments he had achieved back in his time don't even pale in comparison to yours!" Upon speaking about Principal Mo Liuzhen, a hint of admiration couldn't help but surface in the depths of School Head Mo's eyes.

“Oh?” Zhang Xuan remarked in curiosity.

He had thought that he was one-of-a-kind to get into huge incidents one after another from the moment of he arrived in the Master Teacher Academy... Could Principal Mo be one of his kind too?

“Principal Mo isn’t as big of a troublemaker as you...”
Seemingly seeing through Zhang Xuan’s thoughts, School Head Mo replied reflexively before turning red after realizing what he had said.

As an elder of the academy, it was extremely disrespectful of him to call the principal a troublemaker.

However, seeing that the other party didn’t fly into a rage, he heaved a sigh of relief inside. “From the moment Principal Mo arrived in the academy, he broke records all around. To date, the academy’s Mountain of Records is still filled with his accomplishments. Even after four thousand years, there has still not been anyone who could surpass his feats...”

“Mountain of Records?” Zhang Xuan was surprised by the foreign term.

Despite having been in the academy for so long, he had never heard of such a place.

“It is normal that Zhang shi is unaware of it. The Mountain of Records is the place where the 6-star master teacher examination is conducted. No one has challenged the 6-star master teacher examination this semester, so it has been closed the whole time,” School Head Mo replied.

“The previous time it opened was half a year ago when Hu Yaoyao and the others challenged it!”

“Hu Yaoyao?”

School Head Mo nodded. “Indeed. According to the rules of the Master Teacher Pavilion, one has to be a Half-Saint at minimum to qualify as a 6-star master teacher. Otherwise, one can only be considered a half 6-star. However, the couple of them still managed to receive their 6-star emblems, and this is because they have reached the third level in the Mountain of Records!

“The Mountain of Records serves as a platform to examine a master teacher’s cultivation and fighting prowess. To be able to reach the third level means that their fighting prowess is already nearly on par with a Half-Saint. On top of that, they had also passed all of the preceding examinations, so they were given the 6-star master teacher emblem!”

“I see!” Zhang Xuan nodded, and after contemplating for a moment, he asked, “Other than six 6-star supporting occupations, what else is required to take the 6-star master teacher examination?”

Currently, Zhang Xuan had already fulfilled the requirement of six 6-star supporting occupations, and two of them were even at 7-star.

However, there could still be some prerequisites which he might be unaware of.

“Supporting occupations, Soul Depth, and cultivation, these are the three fundamental requirements for one’s qualification to take the master teacher examination!” School Head Mo said.

“You have already met the requirement for supporting occupations. As for Soul Depth, the requirement for a 6-star master teacher is 18.0, and considering that you were able to beguile You Xu easily with the Impartation of Heaven’s Will, that means that your Soul Depth is not a problem.

“And as for cultivation, the minimal requirement for a 6-star master teacher is Half-saint realm. Considering that you are only at Chrysalis realm primary stage, you are still lacking a little. However, if you can clear the third level in the Mountain of Records as well, you should be able to earn the qualifications to take the examination!

“After meeting these three fundamental requirements, what remains is the test to evaluate your accomplishments as a master teacher. This test can come in many forms, and the more common ones are through evaluating one’s students, conducting a lecture, and offering pointers on the spot to a stranger!”

School Head Mo hesitated for a moment before saying, “However, I fear that the difficulty for you will be higher than others. After all, given your identity, there will be many who will keep an eye on your actions. If you choose the easier routes, I fear that others might doubt your capability... Most likely, you will be pressured into taking on the most difficult test of all—Empire Building!”

“Empire Building?” Zhang Xuan frowned in incomprehension.

893 Teaching Zhang Xuan a Lesson?

What he was going to take was the master teacher examination, how did 'Empire Building' come into the picture?

Master teacher examinations were centered around nurturing and guiding others, it shouldn't have anything to do with governance or anything of the sort.

Noticing Zhang Xuan's doubts, School Head Mo asked with a smile, "Principal Zhang, based on your journey here from Tianxuan Kingdom, what do you think the greatest difference between a kingdom and an empire is?"

"Difference?" Zhang Xuan frowned. He contemplated for a moment before replying, "The tier of the local Master Teacher Pavilions!"

Conferred Empire, Tier-1 Empire, Tier-2 Empire, Conferred Kingdom, Tier-1 Kingdom, Tier-2 Kingdom... The main difference between nations of differing classifications was their national strength.

And the biggest contributing factor to the difference in national strength was the Master Teacher Pavilion!

Master teachers nurtured the cultivators in the region they resided in, and the more capable a master teacher was, the stronger the students they taught would be. A capable master teacher could easily cause growth in a nation's power through their teachings.

Putting everything aside, if Tianxuan Kingdom had a 6-star master teacher, the entire kingdom would surely undergo overwhelming changes, and it would only be a matter of time before it became a Tier-1 Empire.

The chain effects that could be brought about by a powerful Master Teacher Pavilion were also significant. Not only would

the locals grow stronger, it would also draw in experts to join the ranks of the nation.

At the same time, it would also attract the other occupations to establish a branch in the area as well, such as a Beast Hall, Apothecary Guild, Blacksmith Guild... These occupation guilds would provide the resources required for the nurturing of experts. With all of these in place, it would be difficult for a nation to not become strong!

Tianxuan Kingdom was only an Unranked Kingdom, but if it had a Master Teacher Pavilion in it, it could have been easily promoted to a Tier-2 Kingdom.

“Indeed, it’s the tier of the local Master Teacher Pavilion!” School Head Mo nodded. “The higher the tier of the local Master Teacher Pavilion, the greater the nation’s potential for growth. This can be said to be an unsaid truth in the Master Teacher Continent. Rather than say that Master Teacher Pavilions were built in kingdoms and empires, it would be more accurate to say that kingdoms and empires were built around Master Teacher Pavilions! Just take Hongyuan Empire for example, the main reason it has been able to withstand the trial of time, even though the surrounding empires have gone through numerous dynasties, is because there is a Master Teacher Academy here!”

Zhang Xuan nodded in agreement.

Even though a Master Teacher Pavilion didn’t necessarily dictate the prosperity and decline of a nation, one thing was for sure—wherever a Master Teacher Pavilion existed, experts would gather, and enemies dared not invade.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had understood what he was driving at, School Head Mo continued.

“Ordinary master teachers taking the 6-star master teacher examination will be evaluated based on their individual actions and accomplishments, but you aren’t an ordinary master teacher. You are the principal of the Master Teacher Academy. You are no longer an individual but the symbol of our entire academy.

“For Empire Building, the examinee is to choose a Conferred Kingdom, and through his prowess as an individual, he is to rebuild the local Master Teacher Pavilion and successfully raise the nation to become an empire! This is a test that assesses not only one’s capability as an individual but one’s grasp of an entire situation as well. It is an extremely difficult test!”

“I see...” Zhang Xuan’s lips began twitching uncontrollably. Turning to School Head Mo, he muttered hesitantly, “This... Is it too late for me to turn down the position as the academy’s principal?”

“...” School Head Mo.

“If I had known that it would be so troublesome, I never would have agreed to it,” Zhang Xuan complained grudgingly.

He only agreed to the position because he was told he would be granted access to all of the books in the academy. On top of that, with School Head Mo and School Head Zhao around, he thought that he wouldn’t have to bother with most miscellaneous affairs regarding the academy as well.

Who would have thought that not only would the inauguration ceremony be so troublesome, he would even have a face a higher level of difficulty for his 6-star master teacher examination... If he had known in advance, he never would have accepted such a troublesome role!

He would have chosen to remain an ordinary master teacher, take an ordinary 6-star master teacher examination, achieve a breakthrough to Saint realm ordinarily, and turn around and leave... But this... he was now trapped on the darned ship known as the Master Teacher Academy!

Truly, a single mistake leads to a regret of a lifetime!

Zhang Xuan could only sigh endlessly.

“Cough cough!” Choking on his saliva, School Head Mo turned to Zhang Xuan with a look of speechlessness. “Even though your 6-star master teacher examination will be harder than anyone else, clearing it will strengthen your foundation more than the others, thus making it easier for you to be

promoted subsequently. This is also the reason why most talented master teachers opt to take on the more difficult examinations as well. Not only will it temper them, it will also help pave a way ahead of them.”

If anyone else was nominated to become the principal, they would surely be so overwhelmed by delight that they could spend multiple days celebrating. Yet, Principal Zhang was even complaining about it grudgingly...

If Lu Feng were to learn of your response, would he just spurt a mouthful of blood and die on the spot?

Lu Feng put so much into claiming the principal's seat, only for his efforts to end in futility. On the other hand, the position landed in your lap so easily, and yet, you are still so reluctant about it...

“What do you mean by ‘it makes it easier for me to be promoted subsequently’?”

“Oh, it means that as long as you clear the Empire Building test, you will be able to apply for the 7-star master teacher emblem just by meeting the three fundamental prerequisites. You won't have to undergo the 7-star master teacher examination!” School Head Mo explained.

“In other words, as long as you clear this test, you will receive a free pass to becoming a 7-star master teacher! All you will have to do then is to raise your cultivation, temper your Soul Depth, and practice your supporting occupations!”

“There's actually such a good thing in the world?” Hearing that, the slightly frustrated Zhang Xuan's eyes suddenly lit up.

Every master teacher examination consisted of extremely troublesome procedures, filled with many rules and restrictions. If he could get a free pass to becoming a 7-star master teacher by clearing this test, it would definitely be worth the additional effort!

“Indeed!” School Head Mo nodded.

But one thing School Head Mo had neglected to tell Zhang Xuan was that even though the Empire Building test allowed one to skip the 7-star master teacher examination, raising a

Conferred Kingdom into an empire was no easy task. On top of that, not only did it have a high requirement on one's eye of discernment, ability to impart knowledge, and reputation, more importantly, it required time!

Raising a Conferred Kingdom into an Unranked Empire didn't just take a couple of experts here and there but a steady foundation that could sustain the prosperity of the nation as well!

But building a steady foundation was bound to take a long period of time. Back then, Principal Mo Liuzhen had also opted to take on this test, and despite his incredible capability, he had still spent three whole years on it!

"Alright, I have decided. I will take on the Empire Building test for my 6-star master teacher examination!" Zhang Xuan nodded affirmatively.

"..." School Head Mo fell silent.

Why did it seem as if their principal seemed to take things too lightly?

This was the most difficult test of the 6-star master teacher examination, and most master teachers would flee as far as they could as soon as they heard of this test. To agree to it without any hesitation, shouldn't he at least consider it for a little longer?

Even if he had made up his mind, he should at least give a troubled frown or something so as to show some respect for the difficulty of the examination!

To agree so quickly, was he truly confident or did he not understand the difficulty of the test?

School Head Mo opened his mouth for a moment before closing it hesitantly and shook his head.

Their principal was always able to accomplish the unbelievable, producing miracles that others thought impossible.

Take the battle against the Cloudmist Ridge for example, he had honestly thought that they were heading there to negotiate

with the Ten Indomitable Kings, but who knew that their principal was actually intending to overturn the other party's nest!

Perhaps, the most difficult Empire Building in the eyes of most master teachers could really be nothing at all to him.

Taking a glance at the sky to determine the time, School Head Mo realized that it was about time to begin the final preparations for the inauguration ceremony, so he decided to put the matter aside for the time being. "Principal Zhang, we should head to the academy now. School Head Zhao has worked together with the Celestial Designer School to design a special robe for you. You should head over to see if it fits!"

"There is even a special robe?" Zhang Xuan exclaimed before realization struck him.

As the succeeding principal inaugurating into the Master Teacher Academy, he would surely have to dress up well so as to leave a good impression on the attending crowd. Naturally, an ordinary master teacher robe wouldn't do.

Thus, the duo left the manor and headed for the academy.

The Master Teacher Academy was bustling with people. There were many esteemed guests and powerful experts attending the inauguration ceremony, be it the various clans in Hongyuan City or influential figures from the nearby empires. It sure was a rare festive occasion that one might not even witness once in a century.

In order to avoid unneeded trouble, the duo rode the Inferno Dragon Saint Beast straight to the Elder Hall.

...

Crowds flowed in and out of the Master Teacher Academy, and the entire place was bustling wherever one's gaze fell on.

Walking along a broad street, a young man asked, "Ruohuan, you are the most well-connected of us. Do you know who the succeeding principal is?"

Standing in front of him was a white-robed young man who held a foldable fan in his hands. That white-robed young man

had a dashing appearance reminiscent of a young master from a prestigious clan.

He was Ruohuan gongzi, who had come to the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy along with Zhang Xuan from the Myriad Kingdom Alliance.

And the one speaking behind him was also an old friend of Zhang Xuan's, one of the founders of the Xuanxuan Faction... Song Chao!

"How would I know?" Ruohuan gongzi shook his head and replied. "The identity of the succeeding principal is a tightly-guarded secret of the academy, so we will probably only learn of it during the inauguration ceremony."

Even though the Xuanxuan Faction had nearly half of the students in the academy as its members, they were still unable to uncover the identity of the succeeding principal.

"Anyone will do as long as it isn't School Head Lu Feng... He has a grudge with our faction leader, and if he becomes the principal, our Xuanxuan Faction won't be too far away from being dissipated!" Song Chao said worriedly.

"Indeed. Let's just hope for the best!" Shaking his head, Ruohuan gongzi sighed deeply.

The next moment, a young man abruptly rushed up to them anxiously and asked, "Ruohuan, do you know where our faction leader is at the moment?"

He was one of the members of the Xuanxuan Faction as well, a Grade-3 student.

"Why are you looking for our faction leader so anxiously?" Ruohuan gongzi asked with a frown.

Honestly speaking, their faction leader sure was irresponsible, leaving the work of managing the faction all to them. In fact, the other party had even disappeared from the academy without any notice a few days ago, and there was no news whatsoever about where the other party was now.

The young man surveyed the surroundings carefully before speaking in a hushed voice. "It's like this. I was on my way to

the training grounds to find a seat and await the start of the inauguration ceremony when I suddenly encountered some suspicious-looking fellows. They were asking around for the whereabouts of our faction leader, and it seems like they are up to no good...”

“They are trying to find the whereabouts of our faction leader?” Ruohuan gongzi frowned.

“That’s right!” The young man nodded.

Half of the entire academy’s populace were members of the Xuanxuan Faction, so it didn’t take long for those fellows asking around for Zhang Xuan’s whereabouts to catch the attention of its faction members.

“Take me over to take a look!” Ruohuan gongzi instructed before abruptly stopping for a brief moment. “Wait a moment. Call Ying Qin and the others over first!”

“Yes!”

The young man rushed off, and in just a few minutes’ time, he returned with Ying Qin, Bai Mian, and the others behind him.

“Alright, let’s head over to take a look together!” Seeing that everyone was gathered, Ruohuan gongzi gestured for the young man to lead the way.

Not too long later, under the lead of the young man, they found eight peculiarly-dressed fellows walking around the academy. They were scanning their surroundings warily as they moved, stopping passers-by from time to time to ask if they were aware of Zhang Xuan’s whereabouts.

But considering how even Ruohuan gongzi had no idea where Zhang Xuan was at the moment, it was natural that those students were even more oblivious to it.

Approaching slowly with their ears pricked up, they soon heard those peculiarly-dressed fellows whispering discreetly among themselves.

“Why isn’t there anyone who knows about the location of that Zhang Xuan? Young Master Liu has ordered us to teach that fellow a lesson, and we will be in a great deal of trouble if we

mess this matter up. Could that fellow have learned of our plans in advance somehow, and he chose to hide himself out of fright?” a man with a scar on his face said with a conflicted expression.

He had already asked many passers-by, and while all of them seemed to know who Zhang Xuan was, there was not a single person who knew where he was. This had left him extremely troubled.

“They intend to teach our faction leader a lesson? Hah, so they are enemies after all!”

Hearing those words, Ruohuan gongzi, Song Chao, and the others traded gazes and nodded in unison, seemingly coming to an agreement.

To dare to teach their faction leader a lesson, they were truly courting death!

Since that’s the case, allow us to show you the prowess of our Xuanxuan Faction!

You had better pray that your hearts are strong enough to not die of fright once you realize who you have just crossed!

894 He Is the Principal?

Ruohuan gongzi carefully analyzed the cultivation of the eight peculiarly-dressed men before remarking, “Those fellows do possess some strength!”

While they had learned that those fellows were enemies, it would have been unwise to rush in recklessly without gaining an understanding of their strength.

It seemed like the eight of them were all Transcendent Mortal 8-dan Ethereal Treading realm experts, and on top of that, they carried an aura of callousness from the battlefield with them, which hinted that they might be veteran fighters who had gone through many battles in their life.

If their deductions were correct, they should be from the military.

After a moment of contemplation, Ruohuan gongzi instructed, “Song Chao, the rest of you should return to the headquarters for now to make preparations, I will find a way to lure them over shortly after!”

“Alright!” Song Chao nodded before leading the others away.

Waiting for a moment longer after the others had disappeared in the distance, Ruohuan gongzi took in a deep breath and walked up to the group of eight with a bright smile on his face.

“Friends, I heard that you were looking for Zhang Xuan?”

“Indeed. You know where he is?”

The group of eight were still troubled over this matter a moment ago, so upon hearing Ruohuan gongzi’s words, their eyes immediately lit up, and they hurriedly turned their gazes over.

“Of course I do! In fact, I am his closest friend in the academy! Why don’t I take you to him?” Ruohuan gongzi offered with an earnest and amicable smile.

“That would be great!”

Seeing that someone was willing to lead the way to their target, the eight of them nearly leaped up from sheer joy.

As expected of the Master Teacher Academy, the students here were indeed friendly and kind!

It was no wonder everyone hoped to enroll here. Just their manners toward strangers in itself was commendable!

“I will be troubling you then...” A young man, seemingly the leader of the group of eight, stepped forward and clasped his fist.

“There is no need to stand on ceremony. As a master teacher, it is my duty to help those in need!” Ruohuan gongzi spoke righteously as he led the way.

Not too long later, the group finally arrived at the headquarters of the Xuanxuan Faction. At this very moment, gathered in the massive square at the center of the headquarters were over ten thousand students.

“Why are there so many people here? Where is Zhang Xuan?”

Upon seeing that there were so many master teachers in here, the group of eight couldn't help but feel their hair standing on ends as an ominous premonition fell on them.

“Ah, I guess you aren't too familiar with the workings of the Master Teacher Academy. This is the freshman dormitory, and as a student who has only enrolled earlier this year, Zhang Xuan naturally resides here too. The recent batch of freshmen enrolled into the academy is larger than usual, so there are more of us residing here this year. Don't worry, everyone in there is a master teacher, so they won't bite!” Ruohuan gongzi said with a welcoming smile as he gestured the group in.

Even though the group of eight felt a little wary at the situation before them, recalling that they were currently in the Master Teacher Academy, they decided to toss aside their worries and enter.

Before long, they were already standing in the middle of the square, amid the huge crowd.

At this point, Ruohuan gongzi abruptly came to a halt and declared loudly, “Alright, everyone. Here are the men who proclaimed that they would teach our faction leader a lesson!

“Give them the beating of their life, make them spill out the name of the mastermind behind them!”

“Alright!”

“To dare cross our faction leader, you must be tired of living!”

...

Before the group of eight could process what was going on, blows were already raining down on them, striking every inch of their bodies.

Fists, feet, metal pipes, bricks, flower pots, chairs... and even sandals!

Pili pala!

Before they had even met Zhang Xuan, they were already pummeled to the point where they were about to forget their own names...

Their eyes gradually turned moist, and before long, they were bawling sorrowfully...

The hell! Who was the one who said that master teachers were friendly and kind?

Who was the one who said that the Master Teacher Academy was a safe haven, and it was impossible for anything bad to happen there?

Just who in the world did they provoke for them to deserve such treatment?

...

Ten minutes later, the eight Ethereal Treading realm soldiers were lying flat on the ground, their bodies convulsing uncontrollably as if electricity was running through their veins.

Even though most of the members of the Xuanxuan Faction were freshmen, possessing cultivation at only the Consonant Spirit realm or so, there were simply too many of them! Ten

thousand men attacking eight men simultaneously... No matter how powerful the group of eight was, it was impossible for their sixteen hands to fend off against twenty thousand hands simultaneously!

At the current moment, their faces were bruised all over, and there was not a single patch of uninjured skin on them.

Seeing that the group of eight was already on the verge of dying, Ruohuan gongzi had the crowd stop before walking forward to begin his interrogation.

Having suffered a vicious beating, both their minds and bodies were already at their limits. As such, they ended up confessing obediently.

“The ones who ordered us to teach Zhang Xuan a lesson are Liu Quan and Shen Jun from the Four Great Clans. They said that as long as we do this well, they will give us ten high-tier spirit stones...” the young man with a scar on his face said.

He could only be considered an acquaintance of Liu Qian’s from the military, so there was no need for him to hide the secret for him.

“Where are Shen Jun and Liu Quan now?” Ruohuan gongzi continued asking.

“They should be in the Master Teacher Academy now. We agreed to meet at the gazebo by the lake to make the trade once we accomplished our mission,” the young man hurriedly replied.

“Un.” Ruohuan gongzi nodded before beckoning the crowd.
“Go, let’s take a look!”

Thus, the many members of the Xuanxuan Faction began marching together toward the lake located at the center of the Master Teacher Academy.

...

In one of the gazebos by the lake stood Shen Jun and Liu Quan. They had their hands behind their backs as they gazed at the lake glistening under the warm rays of the sun, enjoying the beautiful scenery.

A light breeze blew, bringing forth light ripples on the surface of the lake.

“They should be done teaching Zhang Xuan a lesson by now, right?” Shen Jun asked.

That fellow had put him in a spot during Princess Yu Fei-er’s birthday banquet. He wouldn’t be able to quell the rage in his heart unless he returned the favor to the other party.

“Young Master Shen, we have known each other for a long time; when have I failed before?” Liu Quan chuckled softly. “The men I have gathered this time are acquaintances from the military. They are capable individuals who possess the cultivation of Ethereal Treading realm; subduing that Zhang Xuan will be a walk in the park for them! On top of that, given the shallow ties we have, no one will be able to trace the matter back to us!”

“That would be for the best! It doesn’t matter whether that fellow finds out that it was me or not, the important matter is for Fei-er to never learn of it...” Shen Jun nodded.

“Don’t worry!” Liu Quan patted Shen Jun’s back and reassured him. However, just as he was about to continue speaking, two master teachers suddenly walked into the gazebo and asked, “Pardon me, may I know if you are Young Master Shen Jun and Young Master Liu Quan?”

“Indeed, we are.” Seeing two unfamiliar faces verifying their identities, the duo frowned in confusion, unsure of what was going on. Just as they were about to ask what business the other party had with them, the vision before them abruptly blurred. Two specially created gunny sacks had been placed over their heads.

And following which...

Pili pala!

Sharp pain abruptly assaulted every single part of their body. In that instant, the both of them felt as if over ten thousand men were assaulting them simultaneously, trampling on their bodies viciously.

...

After an unknown period of time, the duo finally awoke.

Attempting to get up, a sharp pain immediately assaulted them, leaving them writhing in pain. Only then did they realize that there was not a single part of their bodies that was still intact. Broken bones, bruised face, shattered teeth... Even if their parents were here at this very moment, it was doubtful they would be able to recognize their own children!

They hadn't done anything since arriving at the Master Teacher Academy, but they suddenly found themselves being pummeled so viciously.

To make things worse, they didn't even know the culprit behind it...

Who can tell me what is going on?

After a long period of time, the duo spat through clenched jaws, "It must be Zhang Xuan!"

No matter how foolish they were, the only one they had a feud with in the Master Teacher Academy was Zhang Xuan.

They had come here to teach Zhang Xuan a lesson, only to be pummeled themselves... They would never believe it if the latter wasn't the one pulling the strings behind this incident!

"Young Master Shen, what should we do?" Liu Quan asked.

"What else can we do? Let's return to our own manors and report the matter to the clan head. We must make sure to teach that fellow a harsh lesson. He shall learn that the members of the Four Great Clans aren't people a pesky fellow like him can afford to cross..." Shen Jun bellowed furiously.

In their current state, it was impossible for them to attend the inauguration ceremony.

Since that was the case, they could only return to their homes to report this matter to their fathers so as to have them get back at Zhang Xuan for them.

Since you dared to raise your fist against us, let us see if your fist will be tough enough to stand against the prowess of two of the Four Great Clans!

...

The enormous training grounds of the Master Teacher Academy was packed with men. There had to be at least a hundred thousand men gathered in the area.

This was where the inauguration ceremony would be held. The emperors and pavilion masters of the neighboring empires, along with the experts of all kinds of powers, had assembled there to witness the grand ceremony welcoming the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy.

“It’s about to begin!”

“The new principal must be either School Head Zhao or School Head Lu. Even though they are still lacking slightly compared to the old principal, they are currently the two most capable and respected elders in the academy!”

“Indeed. It’s truly a pity that the old principal went missing, and to date, we still don’t know whether he is dead or alive! However, based on the information leaked out from the academy, it doesn’t look positive!”

“I heard that the succeeding principal was the one who proposed a negotiation with the Cloudmist Ridge. I think that he owes us an explanation for that!”

“You’re right! How could he stoop so low to bow to mere beasts? In any case, I will never approve of this. Let’s make him spill out what shameful terms he had to promise the Cloudmist Ridge in order to make them retreat!”

...

Such discussions could be heard from the crowds beneath. Everyone’s eyes were gathered on the highest pedestal in the center of the square, curious to know who the succeeding principal would be!

Hu!

Amidst the discussions, a few elders abruptly flew across the air.

“Silence!”

The one who spoke was Zhao Bingxu.

Everyone was taken aback.

If Zhao Bingxu had appeared here at this very moment, did it mean that the succeeding principal was... Lu Feng?

Even though they were overwhelmed by curiosity, the crowd still quietened down.

“It has been two years since the old principal went missing, and since then, the Master Teacher Academy has become divided. Even though it is fortunate that nothing severe has come out of it, the Master Teacher Academy cannot continue on in such a state. Thus, three days ago, under Mu Shi’s leadership, the Ten Great Master Teachers unanimously decided on our next principal!”

Zhao Bingxu’s powerful voice echoed throughout the entire square, allowing each and every one of the hundred thousand gathered there to hear his words clearly.

“Today, we shall witness the inauguration ceremony of our next principal. I believe that with the capability of our new principal, our Master Teacher Academy will be brought to greater heights! With this, let’s begin the first formality of the inauguration ceremony. First and foremost, let’s welcome our new principal to the stage!”

As Zhao Bingxu’s voice came to a halt, a figure slowly walked through the crowd, heading toward the stage.

Upon seeing this figure, everyone was stunned, especially the students of the Master Teacher Academy. Their eyes were bulging from their sockets, unable to believe what they were seeing?

“What is our faction leader doing?”

“Is he trying to exact vengeance on School Head Lu by messing up the inauguration ceremony?”

“It’s one thing for him to wreak havoc in the Apothecary School and empty it of its students and teachers, that is at least still an internal conflict within the academy, but there are many outsiders watching here today!”

“This is bad. Someone, hurry and stop our faction leader!”

The members of the Xuanxuan Faction were scared out of their wits, and some of faint-hearted ones even nearly blacked out.

They knew that their faction leader was a troublemaker, but this was the inauguration ceremony of the new principal. Countless foreign master teachers, emperors, and influential figures were witnessing the ceremony... To cause trouble at such an important ceremony was no different from seeking death!

If the Master Teacher Pavilion headquarters were to learn of this, the consequences were not something that their faction leader could bear!

“Teacher? What is... teacher doing?”

“Teacher...”

Not only were the members of the Xuanxuan Faction aghast, Luo Qiqi, Wang Ying, Liu Yang, and Zheng Yang were also horror-struck.

No one had informed them that Zhang Xuan was the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy, so they were unaware of the matter. As such, they also thought that their teacher was heading up to the stage in order to cause trouble...

Just as nearly everyone was bewildered, unsure of what was going on, Zhao Bingxu’s voice sounded once more.

“Alright, allow me to formally introduce the next principal of our Master Teacher Academy to everyone... Zhang shi!”

“The next principal?”

“Our faction leader is our next principal?”

“This... How can this be possible?”

The entire training grounds fell deathly silent for a brief instant before a huge ruckus swept through the crowd like a wave. Every single person, be it student or teacher, widened

their eyes in astonishment, and for that instant, they thought that the world had gone insane.

Zhao Bingxu, Lu Feng, Mo Zhu, Zhong Dingchun, Jiang Qingqin, Wei Ranxue...

If it had been any of them, they would only have been surprised at the very most...

But this fellow...

Can anyone freaking tell me what is going on?

895 Challenging the Principal

“Is this Zhang shi whom you spoke about? He is much younger than I expected!”

In the area of the training grounds where the emperors were seated, Zhu Yi frowned in displeasure.

He had already learned that the succeeding principal was only a twenty-year-old 4-star master teacher a few hours ago from Yu Shenqing, but even though he had known this was going to happen, it didn't stop him from doubting his eyes when he saw an incredibly young man heading toward the stage.

Never in the history of the Master Teacher Academy had anyone that young become the principal!

Were the Ten Great Master Teachers out of their minds? How could they nominate such a young brat as the principal?

“Didn't Mu shi nominate Zhang shi as the principal too? Where is he?” one of the emperors asked.

Hearing those words, the others scanned the surroundings as well, but they couldn't find Mu shi anywhere.

“Mu shi has left last night due to some urgent matters cropping up,” Yu Shenqing explained.

“Left last night? Urgent matters cropping up?” Zhu Yi sneered coldly. “More like he doesn't wish to watch this farce unfold!”

In Zhu Yi's view, nominating a twenty-year-old brat as the principal of the Master Teacher Academy was, in itself, a huge farce.

“Brother Zhu, don't jump to conclusions so quickly. You might have a different view of Zhang shi once you get to know him better...” Seeing that Zhu Yi was so prejudiced against Zhang Xuan, Yu Shenqing sighed deeply. Knowing that it was

impossible to change the other party's view with just words, he could only say those words.

"Let's just hope that is the case," Zhu Yi replied perfunctorily.

...

The same sight was also occurring in the area where the heads of the regional Master Teacher Pavilion were seated. Upon seeing that the succeeding principal was so young, their faces turned livid.

Zhang Xuan had also noticed the commotion below, but he paid it no heed and continued walking calmly onto the stage.

He knew that for someone as young as him to become the principal, it was natural that there were many who doubted his capability.

Ignoring the discussions below, Zhao Bingxu announced, "Zhang shi might be young, but he possesses exceptional talent and capability. He has received the unanimous approval of Mu shi and the Ten Great Master Teachers to take the position of the 104th principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy!"

"We shall proceed on with the first formality, the Question Symposium! Is there anyone who wishes to pose a question to Principal Zhang?"

An elder immediately stood up as soon as Zhao Bingxu finished speaking. "I have a question for Principal Zhang!"

The head of the Hongchi Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Wu Weitian!

Wu Weitian was a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, and he possessed exceptional standing and respect in the surrounding empires. Back then, in the selection of the Ten Great Master Teachers of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, he had lost to Zhao Bingxu by only a single vote. Had that not been the case, he would have been the head of the Blacksmith School at this very moment.

"May I know what kind of question Wu shi has for our principal?" Zhao Bingxu frowned.

The convention was to have several representatives pose the questions.

For Wu Weitian to speak up so abruptly, it was clear that the other party was intent on causing trouble. However, the other party possessed a standing equivalent to his, so Zhao Bingxu didn't have the right to reprimand the other party for his actions.

“The principal of the Master Teacher Academy must possess superior strength, or else how could he command the respect of the masses?” Wu Weitian said as a powerful aura burst forth from him.

“I am Wu Weitian, the pavilion master of Hongchi Empire. While my standing might be beneath that of Principal Zhang, I wish to challenge Principal Zhang to a cultivation duel. I hope that you can accede to my request!”

“A cultivation duel?”

“He is clearly trying to humiliate that young lad there...”

“Indeed! That lad is only twenty years old. Even if he started cultivating from his mother's womb, how strong can he possibly get? On the other hand, Wu Weitian is a pavilion master, so little has to be said about his prowess. To challenge that lad to a cultivation duel... he sure isn't giving that lad any face at all!”

...

Hearing Wu Shi's words, a disturbance rippled through the crowd.

A master teacher's capability to impart knowledge and nurture the capability of others was important, but without sufficient power, it would be difficult to command respect from others, and the master teacher's credibility would be called into question as well.

It was just like how a Transcendent Mortal master teacher would never be able to guide a Saint realm cultivator in their cultivation; even if the Transcendent Mortal master teacher did indeed possess deep knowledge of Saint realm cultivation, he

would have to find a way to win the trust of the Saint realm cultivator first!

To challenge the new principal to a cultivation duel right from the start, it could be said that Wu shi was intending to humiliate him through and through.

“Wu shi, Principal Zhang is only at Chrysalis realm primary stage at the moment. How can he be a match against a Saint realm 1-dan pinnacle expert like you?”

Not expecting Wu shi to make such a request, Zhao Bingxu’s face darkened. However, at that moment, Zhang Xuan abruptly raised his hand to stop Zhao Bingxu before turning his gaze to Wu Weitian.

“Pavilion Master Wu, you wish to challenge me to a cultivation duel?”

“Indeed. I hope that Principal Zhang can accede to my request!” Wu Weitian sneered coldly.

It was his intention to make things difficult for Zhang Xuan today, cornering and humiliating him before the crowd that had gathered.

“I can agree to your request, but before that, I would like to ask, what do you define as ‘cultivation’?” Zhang Xuan asked.

“Cultivation refers to one’s fighting prowess!” Wu Weitian replied without any hesitation.

“I see. So, as a beast tamer, if I were to have my tamed beast aid me in my fight, is that considered part of my fighting prowess as well?” Zhang Xuan asked calmly.

“The ability to tame beasts is considered part of one’s capability as a beast tamer, so naturally, one’s tamed beast is considered part of one’s fighting prowess too.” Even though he did not understand why Zhang Xuan would ask such a question, Wu Weitian still replied to it nevertheless.

A beast tamer fighting alongside his tamed beast could be considered synonymous to a martial artist fighting using his weapon.

“I see.”

Chuckling softly, Zhang Xuan raised his hand and said, “Byzantium Lad, I will be leaving this fellow to you then!”

“Yes, Master!”

Along with a furious roar, the crowd saw a massive saint beast descending from the sky, its massive palm aimed straight for Wu Weitian.

“What?” Not expecting a Spiritual Perception realm saint beast to emerge out of nowhere, before Wu Weitian could even process what was going on, he was already smacked into the ground by the might of the palm, and huge spurts of blood spewed from his mouth.

Even when the Byzantium Helios Beast was still at Saint realm 1-dan, none of the Ten Great Master Teachers were a match for it. Even though Wu Weitian was not weak, he stood no chance against the Spiritual Perception realm Byzantium Helios Beast.

After Wu Weitian was smacked into the ground, Zhang Xuan turned to the crowd and said calmly, “Allow me to introduce everyone. This is my tamed beast, Byzantium Helios Beast.”

“Isn’t the Byzantium Helios Beast the old principal’s tamed beast? How did Zhang shi manage to tame it?”

“Wait a moment, doesn’t it seem like Senior Byzantium Helios is significantly stronger than before?”

“The strength of a tamed beast is considered part of the strength of the beast tamer as well. Since the Byzantium Helios Beast is Zhang shi’s tamed beast, that means that Zhang shi possesses strength beyond Saint realm 1-dan as well!”

...

Zhang Xuan’s words caused a huge ruckus to break out beneath the stage.

Beast tamers had always been feared for the frightening strength that their tamed beasts possessed. Given that Zhang Xuan had such a powerful tamed beast, who would dare to underestimate him anymore?

...

Shortly after Wei Weitian's defeat, someone else within the crowd spoke up.

"I admit that you are indeed capable to have been able to tame the Byzantium Helios Beast. However, a man who possesses nothing but power can only be said to be a brute. To become the principal of the Master Teacher Academy, you must have a high Soul Depth as well. Thus, I, Liao Cong, wish to challenge Principal Zhang to a duel of Soul Depth. I hope that you can accede to my request!"

Zhao Bingxu turned his gaze over.

It was the head of the Yuanjiang Empire Master Teacher Pavilion, Pavilion Master Liao Cong!

Pavilion Master Liao was slightly lacking in terms of strength as compared to Wu Weitian, but he was known for his incredible composure. It was rumored that he possessed an exceptional Soul Depth of 20.9, just a step short of reaching the level of a 7-star master teacher!

"A duel of Soul Depth?" Zhang Xuan asked doubtfully.

"That's right!" Pavilion Master Liao Cong nodded.

Given that the other party had the Byzantium Helios Beast—a Spiritual Perception realm spirit beast—on his side, there was no way he would be a match for the other party in terms of fighting prowess. Thus, he would have to use other means to corner the other party.

In any case, as long as he could defeat the other party in any challenge, the entire inauguration ceremony would be reduced to a farce.

"Fine by me. How should we conduct the duel?" Zhang Xuan asked impassively.

"Simple. We shall use the Impartation of Heaven's Will on one another, and whoever manages to beguile the other will be the victor!" Pavilion Master Liao Cong said with a confident smile.

"Impartation of Heaven's Will?" Zhang Xuan was slightly taken aback for a moment before shaking his head. "Change it

to something else, I don't have an interest in bullying others..."

His Impartation of Heaven's Will had grown considerably stronger after comprehending the Heart of a Teacher, allowing him to make the hundred thousand spirit beasts of Cloudmist Ridge submit to him.

A mere 6-star master teacher like you, just where did you find the confidence to challenge me?

"You..." Hearing those words, Pavilion Master Liao Cong nearly burst with rage.

I am a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, a person who possesses a Soul Depth of 20.9! Yet, you said that... you don't want to bully me?

Ridiculous!

"Why? Are you backing out from my challenge?" Pavilion Master Liao Cong spat through clenched jaws.

With a glint in his eyes, Zhang Xuan said, "Since Pavilion Master Liao insists on it, I will accept your challenge then. How about this? Pavilion Master Wu was injured in the previous duel, so why don't you help him out?"

There was a peculiar quality in his voice that seemed to compel others into obedience.

"Yes..." Pavilion Master Liao Cong was stunned for a brief moment before walking up to Pavilion Master Wu and driving his zhenqi to pull the latter out of the ground. However, as soon as he finished doing that, he suddenly froze.

To obey the other party's commands, it was clear that he had just been beguiled!

"You..."

Pavilion Master Liao Cong's face turned livid, and just as he was about to speak, the young man opposite to him continued speaking with a composed look. "It seems like there are some problems with your cultivation. Do you feel a persistent dryness in your throat and an aching pain in your Huyang

acupoint? Don't worry, the symptom should be resolved by slapping yourself twice..."

"Slapping himself?"

"This... Pavilion Master Liao can't be so foolish as to listen to that, can he?"

"That is clearly an attempt to humiliate Pavilion Master Liao..."

...

Hearing those words, the hundred thousand people gathered in the training ground were taken aback. Every single eye in the area was gathered on Pavilion Master Liao Cong, waiting intently to see how he would react.

But before countless faces of disbelief, Pavilion Master Liao Cong raised his palm and struck his face forcefully.

Pah! Pah!

After the two powerful slaps, blood began flowing out of the edges of Pavilion Master Liao Cong's mouth.

Paying no heed to the shocked crowd, Zhang Xuan continued. "Do a handstand right now and channel your zhenqi downward!"

Without any hesitation, Pavilion Master Liao Cong immediately flipped over and did a handstand. A few breaths later, his face started swelling up intensely due to the two previous slaps.

"What is going on?"

"Could this be... Impartation of Heaven's Will?"

"But even if he is under the effects of the Impartation of Heaven's Will, it shouldn't be possible to make a 6-star pinnacle master teacher, the head of a Master Teacher Pavilion, slap himself and do a handstand on a whim, right?"

"I have no idea what is going on either. However, it is clear that Pavilion Master Liao has lost utterly in this duel of Soul Depth!"

...

Seeing Pavilion Master Liao, who had just challenged Zhang Xuan to humiliate the latter, abruptly slapping himself and doing a handstand, everyone felt lightheaded. The situation before them was unbelievable, they couldn't make sense out of what was happening at all!

As master teachers, they were capable of using Impartation of Heaven's Will themselves. However, to make another harm himself and pose in humiliating postures publicly, that was far beyond their capability.

In fact, that was already beyond the capability of the Impartation of Heaven's Will itself!

“Unless... Zhang shi isn't playing with him, and there is no mistake with what he is saying, causing Pavilion Master Liao to obey his words instinctively...” a 6-star master teacher amid the crowd remarked.

It was indeed possible for one to control a master teacher's body through the Impartation of Heaven's Will for a short period of time, but it was only on the basis that the words spoken were flawless and aligned with the essence of the world.

Even though he had no idea why Pavilion Master Liao would have to slap himself and do a handstand, there should be no mistake with the instructions. Otherwise, even if Zhang shi's Soul Depth was far beyond Pavilion Master Liao's, it was still impossible for him to make Pavilion Master Liao obey his commands unconditionally.

Pu!

A moment later, before everyone's astonished gazes, Pavilion Master Liao spurted a mouthful of blood and fell to the ground. Following which, he got back to his feet, and facing the young man on the stage once more, he clasped his fist. This time, instead of skepticism, his eyes were filled with admiration and respect.

“Zhang shi, I am truly grateful to you for saving my life...”

896 Fight Among Students

“Saving his life?”

The succeeding principal had used the Impartation of Heaven’s Will to make Pavilion Master Liao Cong embarrass himself publicly, but not only was the latter not angry at all, the latter had even thanked him for saving his life...

This sight left the crowd confounded.

They hadn’t expected the situation to develop in such an unexpected manner.

Noticing the doubt in everyone’s eyes, Pavilion Maser Liao Cong shook his head and explained, “In my hastiness to accomplish, I erred in my cultivation, resulting in my flow of zhenqi becoming disrupted, an aching pain in my Huyang acupoint, and a slight deterioration of my organs. I thought it was nothing much, and I only had to take note of it in the future to prevent any further deterioration!

“But after Principal Zhang’s guidance, I realized that the foundation of my cultivation has actually been damaged. The two slaps to my face were actually to open my Longxi and Chiyang acupoints, which allowed my zhenqi to clear the blockage in my meridians. After which, the handstand served to circulate my zhenqi, thus solving the hidden trauma within my body!

“Despite my provocation and attempt to humiliate Principal Zhang, he was still willing to overlook the matter and treat my trauma... This is the magnanimity of a true master teacher! From this day forth, I declare that our Hongchi Empire Master Teacher Pavilion will support him as the principal, and this decision shall stand as long as I live!” Pavilion Master Liao Cong vowed as he raised his hand.

“This is possible too?”

“A hidden trauma is solved with just two slaps and a handstand?”

A commotion broke out beneath the stage. Everyone stared at one another, unable to believe their eyes. Had they not seen how Pavilion Master Liao Cong provoked Zhang Xuan earlier, they might have really thought that those two were just putting on an act!

“This Principal Zhang...”

In the area where the emperors sat, Zhu Yi swallowed a mouthful of saliva and muttered, “It seems like he does possess some capability after all!”

Just like the pavilion masters, he had harbored doubts regarding Zhang Xuan’s capability due to his young age, and he had thought that the reason the latter had become the principal was due to pulling some strings behind the curtains. However, after witnessing how the latter dealt with the challenge of two of the pavilion masters decisively and promptly, his opinion of the latter was starting to change.

Another emperor beside him shook his head and remarked, “Let’s watch on first. I still think that he’s a little too young for such an important position.”

While age wasn’t a determining factor to gauge a master teacher’s capability, it wasn’t without reason that most were concerned about it. Time often tempered one’s character and granted one collectedness, which allowed one to remain rational regardless of the situation. In comparison, the young were more prone to reckless outbursts, and in times of crisis, that could prove to be a fatal flaw. Given the importance of the Master Teacher Academy, this was a risk they couldn’t afford to take.

“It seems like Zhang Shi’s Soul Depth is above Pavilion Master Liao’s. I am truly impressed.”

While the two emperors were chatting, yet another elder stood up amid the crowd and spoke. “However, to become the principal, one’s ability to impart and guide others is still extremely important. Despite my incompetence, I have taken in a few students and taught them, and they happen to be present for the ceremony today. If Principal Zhang doesn’t

mind, could you allow them to spar with your students so as to gauge your ability to impart?”

“A spar between students?”

“That sure is a vicious move!”

...

The crowd flew into an uproar after hearing those words.

The core responsibility of a teacher was to impart knowledge, and the most direct way to determine one’s capability to impart knowledge was through assessing the students one taught. The more capable one’s students were, the more capable the teacher would be perceived to be.

If the principal of the Master Teacher Academy was lacking in the ability to impart knowledge, that would mean that he had failed as a teacher!

From this aspect, it could be said that this elder was even more vicious than the previous two.

If Wu Weitian and Liao Cong had only intended to humiliate Zhang Xuan, this fellow was attempting to force Zhang Xuan off a cliff!

Zhang Shi was a talented individual, and he possessed astounding capability far beyond his peers, but ultimately, he was only twenty years old, and his cultivation was only at Chrysalis realm... Given such, how powerful could his students be?

Huala!

Shortly after the elder said those words, a middle-aged man stood up, and a powerful aura burst from him.

A Saint realm 1-dan advanced stage expert!

With such strength, he was already on par with the elders of the Master Teacher Academy!

“Principal Zhang, that man is Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun from Baituo Empire. If I am not mistaken, the middle-aged man is his direct disciple, Hong Lin. The latter has been learning from Pavilion Master Xue for over a hundred years,

and 35 years ago, he reached Saint realm 1-dan...” Zhao Bingxu hurriedly filled Zhang Xuan in on the details through zhenqi telepathy.

“That middle-aged man has been his disciple for over a hundred years?” Zhang Xuan was rendered speechless.

That Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun sure was ruthless. Putting aside the fact his direct disciple’s cultivation was at Saint realm 1-dan advanced stage, just the fact that Hong Lin had studied under a pavilion master of a Tier-1 Empire for over a hundred years meant that it was likely that he possessed exceptional capability among his peers, and it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he was invincible among cultivators of the same power level.

If it had been any other challenge, Zhang Xuan might still have been able to turn it down through finding an excuse somehow. However, a duel between students involved his dignity as a teacher and his fundamental capability as a master teacher; turning it down would be a huge blow to his credibility and reputation.

In other words, whether he liked it or not, as a master teacher and the succeeding principal of the Master Teacher Academy, he had no choice but to accept the duel.

As expected of the most powerful figure within a regional Master Teacher Pavilion, he sure wasn’t an easy person to deal with.

Just as Zhang Xuan was still busy contemplating over how he should deal with this matter, the middle-aged man Hong Lin turned to him and clasped his fist. “I wish to challenge Principal Zhang’s students to a duel. May I know who my opponent is?”

“We are here!” As soon as Hong Lin uttered those words, a few voices sounded clearly across the training grounds.

Everyone turned their gazes over and saw Wang Ying, Zheng Yang, and Liu Yang rising from their seats.

They were the guest elders of the Master Teacher Academy, so naturally, they couldn’t be absent for the inauguration

ceremony either.

At this very moment, the strongest of them, Wang Ying, had achieved a breakthrough recently, reaching the Cosmos Bridge realm.

To reach the Cosmos Bridge realm at sixteen, she would definitely be considered an incredible genius regardless of where she was. However, she was still far from a match for the Saint realm 1-dan advanced stage Hong Lin.

“There’s no hope of victory whatsoever...” The head of the Martial Arts School, Xu Changqing, shook his head and sighed deeply.

He was the one who had invited Wang Ying and the others to become guest elders of the Master Teacher Academy, so he had a clear understanding of their capability.

They had an extremely solid foundation, which allowed them to stand toe to toe even against cultivators with a higher cultivation than them. However, there was simply too huge a gap between them and Hong Lin. Even if Hong Lin were to lower his cultivation realm, given the disparity in their experience and reaction speed, he would still be able to defeat them easily!

A gap of six realms wasn’t something that could be overcome by just a strong foundation or a deep understanding of battle techniques.

“You are the students of Principal Zhang? Haha, I can suppress my cultivation to be equal to yours when we fight!” Upon seeing that even the strongest among Zhang Xuan’s students was only at the Cosmos Bridge realm, Hong Lin couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

He could easily kill cultivators of that tier with just a puff of his breath. There was no doubt whatsoever; he would be the victor of this duel!

“Come at me then!” With a furious roar, Wang Ying leaped onto the stage. Hong Lin chuckled softly before following suit as well.

A tense atmosphere drifted between the two as they faced one another squarely. Zhang Xuan was just about to step forward to offer some guidance to Wang Ying ahead of the duel when another voice abruptly sounded.

“Senior Wang Ying, you are teacher’s direct disciple. It would be making a mountain out of a molehill to have you face this lad, allow me to fight in your place instead!”

Hu!

Following which, an old man descended onto the stage and bowed deeply to Zhang Xuan with a clasped fist. “Student Jiang Qingqin pays respect to teacher!”

“Un.” Upon seeing the other party, Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up. How could he have forgotten that he still had another student here?

The old man was none other than the head of the Demonic Tunist School, Jiang Qingqin!

The other party had acknowledged him as his teacher through a formal ceremony, so he could totally take Wang Ying’s place!

“Isn’t that School Head Jiang?”

“One of the Ten Great Master Teachers, School Head Jiang, is actually Zhang shi’s student?”

“You must be joking! How could that be possible?”

“But since School Head Jiang has already said it, there is no doubt about its authenticity. All master teachers view lineage with grave importance, let alone a 6-star pinnacle master teacher like School Head Jiang, so how could he simply acknowledge another as his teacher easily? Even if he intended to help Zhang shi, he wouldn’t go to such an extent just for that!”

“Even so, I just find this matter hard to believe!”

“Indeed. For Zhang shi to have tamed the old principal’s tamed beast and even take School Head Jiang as his student... it really feels like I am in a dream!”

...

The news that Zhang Xuan had accepted Jiang Qingqin as his student had never been made public, so no one other than the Ten Great Master Teachers were aware of the matter. Hearing of this matter for the first time, the crowd beneath the stage widened their eyes in disbelief.

A 6-star pinnacle master teacher had acknowledged a 4-star master teacher as his teacher? Even though School Head Jiang had admitted to it himself, the crowd still found it hard to accept.

“School Head Jiang...”

Beneath the stage, Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun staggered weakly and nearly keeled over.

He had thought that given Zhang Xuan’s low cultivation and young age, the other party’s student would only, at best, be at the Cosmos Bridge realm. Yet, all of a sudden, a member of the Ten Great Master Teachers who was even stronger than him appeared, how was this battle supposed to go on?

While he was feeling stifled, on the stage, Jiang Qingqin chuckled softly and said, “You are the student of Pavilion Master Xue? Haha, I can suppress my cultivation to be equal to yours when we fight!”

Hearing those words, Hong Lin’s eyelids began twitching.

Those were the exact words that he had said to Zhang Xuan’s students just a moment ago, and Jiang Qingqin had returned them to him word for word.

“You...”

Knowing that it was too late to back down, Hong Lin gritted his teeth and said, “Come!”

Following which, he swiftly flicked his wrist and whipped out a sword.

Tzz la!

The cold glint of a sword flashed through the air as it shot for Jiang Qingqin.

It must be said that Hong Lin's comprehension of swordsmanship had reached a profound realm, achieving the level of Sword-Man Union. Of course, he was still no match for Zhang Xuan, but he was at least on par with Wang Ying and the others in terms of proficiency of battle techniques.

If Wang Ying and the others were to fight him in a battle, they would stand no chance whatsoever.

Putting aside the other party's superior eye of discernment and reaction speed, just the battle experience he had accumulated over the past hundreds of years of his life would make him more than a match for Wang Ying and the others, who had never faced a life-and-death battle in their life.

However, just this bit of prowess meant nothing to School Head Jiang. With a light chuckle, he took out a zither and stroked it gently, and a crisp note immediately rang out.

Triiiinggg!

A sound reminiscent of a vase breaking echoed resoundingly in the air.

Before Hong Lin could react, his sword had already shattered completely, and, 'hu!', with a huge burst of wind, his figure was sent flying from the stage as if a cockroach. His silhouette swiftly grew smaller and smaller in the distance before eventually disappearing from sight with a twinkle.

Judging from the distance he flew, even if he were to survive this ordeal, he would be bedridden for the next few days.

"7-star demonic tunist?" Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun abruptly stood up from his seat.

Under normal circumstances, even though there was some disparity between School Head Jiang and Hong Lin's strength, it would still have been difficult for the former to defeat the latter in just a single move... unless the former's comprehension of demonic tunes had reached 7-star!

In the face of a demonic tunist of this tier, even he could only flee as far as he could, not daring to face the other party head on.

To acknowledge Zhang Xuan as his teacher despite possessing such strength...

Was there a screw loose in his head?

While Xue Cangyun was baffled by the situation before him, he suddenly heard the displeased mumblings of Wei Ranxue, another member of the Ten Great Master Teachers, not too far away from him.

“Damn it, I let that fellow get ahead of me! Since Zhang Xuan is a half-teacher of mine, I can be considered a partial student of his too... Against such a fellow, sending in a full-fledged student is such a waste. A half-student like me is more than sufficient...”

“School Head Wei is his student as well?” Pavilion Master Xue suddenly felt the sight before him darken.

“...”

The students and teachers of the academy staggered as they turned to look at Zhang Xuan once more, this time with twitching lips.

Brother... We can accept the fact that you have tamed the tamed beast of the old principal, turned half of the student populace into members of your Xuanxuan Faction, becoming the half-teacher of the tens of thousands of Apothecary School students...

But to make at least two of the Ten Great Master Teachers your students... How are we supposed to accept that?

When did the Master Teacher Academy become your possession?

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After sending Hong Lin flying, School Head Jiang put away his zither and scanned the crowd from the stage above with a gaze that sent shivers down one's spine. "Is there anyone else who doubts my teacher's capability? I am more than willing to entertain you with a fight!"

The crowd fell completely silent. Those who had harbored such thoughts previously had been hushed by School Head Jiang's menacing words.

Against a member of the Ten Great Master Teachers, a 7-star demonic tunist at that, how could any of them possibly fight him?

Seeing that there was no response from the crowd, School Head Jiang turned his gaze back to Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun and smirked. "Pavilion Master Xue, don't you still have other students? I don't mind facing them all at once!"

Feeling School Head Jiang's gaze falling on them, Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun's students hurriedly cowered away and lowered their gazes, not daring to meet the other party's eyes.

Given that even the strongest of them, Hong Lin, had been defeated in a single blow, who else would dare face School Head Jiang in a duel?

Sighing deeply, Pavilion Master Xue Cangyun clasped his fist and declared, "Our Baituo Empire Master Teacher Pavilion has no objections to Zhang shi becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy!"

Even he wasn't a match for School Head Jiang, needless to say, his students.

Seeing that Zhang Xuan had managed to overcome this ordeal as well, Zhao Bingxu heaved a sigh of relief. "Of the five representatives of the regional Master Teacher Pavilions, three

have already recognized Principal Zhang. Vice Pavilion Master Bai of Chiyao Empire and Pavilion Master Mo of Hongyuan Empire, what about you?”

As the inauguration ceremony had been organized in a rush, only four representatives from the Master Teacher Pavilions of the nearby empires had managed to make it in time. Counting in the Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion as well, there were a total of five representatives in total.

“Our Chiyao Empire Master Teacher Pavilion has no objections!” Given that the three heads of the other Master Teacher Pavilion were no match for Zhang Xuan, Vice Pavilion Master Bai, as a mere vice head, was less likely to be a match. Thus, he hurriedly stood up and clasped his fist.

“Our Hongyuan Empire Master Teacher Pavilion has always supported Zhang shi as the next principal!” Mo Gaoyuan stood up and clasped his fist as well.

He had witnessed how Zhang shi had risen step by step in Hongyuan City, and he was also the first one to agree to the latter’s succession as the next principal of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy. Naturally, he wouldn’t voice any objections during the inauguration ceremony either.

“Good. Since there are no objections, we shall proceed on to the next formality!” Zhao Bingxu nodded.

The greatest obstacle the succeeding principal would face in the Question Symposium was mainly the representatives from the other Master Teacher Pavilions. Since even the representatives had no objections to the matter, Principal Zhang could be considered to have overcome this formality safely.

At this moment, however, a huge group of students consisting of several hundred people suddenly stood up together, and a representative among them said, “School Head Zhao, we have a question that we would like to ask Principal Zhang!”

The representative was the student who had killed the most spirit beasts in the battle against the Cloudmist Ridge earlier.

Grade-4 student, Zhu Chenqing!

His family had been killed by the spirit beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge, so he harbored great hostility toward them. From the moment he enrolled into the Master Teacher Academy, he had already vowed to eradicate those scourges who had brought great suffering to mankind.

However, it was a pity that, due to several considerations, the Master Teacher Academy had never made a move against the Cloudmist Ridge. At the same time, his influence as a single student was limited, so there was nothing he could do about the matter either.

He had thought that the beast stampede this time around could change the Master Teacher Academy's nonchalant attitude toward the Cloudmist Ridge, forcing them to steel their resolve and eradicate the Cloudmist Ridge once and for all. However, he had never expected that the succeeding principal would actually propose a negotiation with the Cloudmist Ridge... and even come to an agreement with them at that!

It wasn't hard to imagine how furious he had been when he heard the news.

Thus, he rallied all of these students to rise with him for a single reason—to demand an explanation!

In truth, he had managed to rally tens of thousands of people to stand up together with him before the inauguration ceremony, but many of them were from the Xuanxuan Faction. After seeing that the new principal was their faction leader, they changed their mind and decided not to participate, thus resulting in the number of protesters falling to a mere few hundred.

“Speak!” Zhao Bingxu frowned in displeasure, but he gestured for Zhu Chenqing to continue.

“I wish to ask Principal Zhang, when will the Master Teacher Academy clash with the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge once more!” Zhu Chenqing said.

Demanding the principal to reveal the results of the negotiation was extremely disrespectful, and it could be viewed as challenging the authority of the principal. As such,

Zhu Chenqing chose to frame the question in another manner that would be slightly less insolent.

“Finally, someone dropped the bomb!”

“It seems like we aren’t the only ones concerned about the matter regarding the Cloudmist Ridge. It seems like the students also want an explanation as well!”

“Let’s see how the new principal answers that question!”

...

Hearing Zhu Chenqing’s question, Zhu Yi and the others glanced at one another and nodded in agreement.

As emperors of Tier-1 Empires in the region, it didn’t really matter to them who became the principal... What was more important to them was whether or not the new principal had the ability to protect them!

Considering what they had heard about the Cloudmist Ridge, it was inevitable that they would doubt the succeeding principal’s capability.

If the other party couldn’t even deal with mere beasts, could they really expect him to stand up for their empires in times of crisis?

“Clash with the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge?”

Zhang Xuan and Zhao Bingxu traded glances upon hearing the question, and they couldn’t help but chuckle softly. The latter shook his head, stepped forward, and replied, “There’s no need to battle anymore. The problem regarding the Cloudmist Ridge has been thoroughly resolved. No more will we have to worry about facing beast stampedes from them anymore!”

“Thoroughly resolved?” Zhu Chenqing and the other students looked at one another and frowned.

What did those words mean?

No more would they have to worry... Was the other party talking about the promises made by the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge?

But how could the words of the enemy be accepted so simply?
That was taking this matter far too lightly!

If this matter could be resolved that easily, the Master Teacher Academy wouldn't have been so helpless before this matter despite the emergence of numerous outstanding principals in history.

“Pardon me, but since School Head Zhao is so certain of this matter, we would like to know what kind of terms the Master Teacher Academy promised the Cloudmist Ridge that could resolve the problem of beast stampedes once and for all!”
Gritting his teeth, Zhu Chenqing dove straight into the main point.

“Principal Zhang, allow me...”

Noticing the nuances behind Zhu Chenqing's words, Zhao Bingxu took a look at Zhang Xuan and nodded. However, at that instant, an elder abruptly flew in hurriedly from the perimeter of the training grounds.

Before reaching the stage, he was already yelling in a panic, “Principal, elders, bad news!”

“What happened?”

Seeing an elder panicking like that in the midst of the inauguration ceremony, Zhao Bingxu frowned.

“Reporting to School Head Zhao, w-we...” With a pale face, the elder's body trembled intensely as he uttered fearfully, “We have been surrounded by the spirit beasts and saint beasts of Cloudmist Ridge!”

“Surrounded?”

Zhao Bingxu and Zhang Xuan were only slightly bewildered upon hearing the words, but the faces of the crowd instantaneously warped in horror.

For the Master Teacher Academy to actually be surrounded by spirit beasts and saint beasts...

In other words, they were trapped like cornered prey in an enclosure!

Everyone immediately got to their feet, intending to take a look at the situation. However, at that moment, a loud sonic boom reverberated deafeningly through the air.

Hu hu hu!

Raising their gazes, the crowd saw three immense saint beasts flying straight toward the training grounds.

They were the Emerald Bamboo Earth Dragon King, White-eared Beast King, and Steelscale Beast King of the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge.

Even before their arrival, the overwhelming aura of three Saint realm 1-dan beasts permeated the training grounds, leaving the air in the surroundings tempestuous.

Trailing neatly behind them were a dozen Nascent Saint beasts, followed by thirty or so Half-Saint beasts!

If it had been just this, there was no way the crowd of a hundred thousand gathered in the training grounds at this very moment could possibly fear them. However, flying behind them was a huge formation of three thousand aerial spirit beasts!

Each of them was at least at Transcendent Mortal 7-dan, and there were even quite a handful that had reached Transcendent Mortal 9-dan. Moving in a neat formation, their majestic cries echoed resoundingly in the air.

With just a single command from their leader, this mighty army could instantly swoop down from the sky and inflict devastating damage on them.

The face of an elder from the Beast Tamer School paled, and he quickly roared furiously, “All master teachers, prepare for battle!”

Hualala!

Having gone through the previous battle, the master teachers behind him swiftly whipped out their weapons and got into formation. Each and every single one of them stared at the aerial spirit beasts warily, prepared to retaliate as soon as any of them made a move.

“Damn it! Those who aren’t one of our own can never be trusted; I have said time and time again that we should never keep such a threat by our side! How could the Master Teacher Academy be so foolish to have thought that they could negotiate with them? Take a good look at what that has brought us!” Zhu Yi cursed with a pale face.

“Expecting the beasts to hold their end of a promise is a joke in itself! For the spirit beasts to fly together neatly without the slightest warning beforehand, it is clear that they have come prepared today! Even if the Master Teacher Academy manages to survive the ordeal today, it will surely suffer devastating damage that it might never recover from...” another emperor remarked with a livid face.

Yet another emperor harrumphed coldly. “Indeed. To come under the attack of a beast stampede in the midst of his inauguration ceremony, that Principal Zhang is doomed to go down in history as a sinner...”

Three thousand aerial spirit beasts and dozens of Half-Saint and Nascent Saint beasts was indeed a fearsome formation, but it wasn’t enough for them to bring them fear yet.

The Master Teacher Academy had many trump cards up its sleeves after several millenniums of history, and on top of that, the Hongyuan Empire royal family was there as well. With their combined force, resolving this conflict wasn’t too difficult. Just that... if this matter were to be made known to others, Zhang Xuan and the Master Teacher Academy would become a laughingstock for many years to come.

Roar! Roar! Roar!

Hong long long! Hong long long!

But just as everyone was preparing themselves for a fight, a deafening war cry from countless beasts abruptly sounded in unison, shaking the heavens. Soon after, the ground began shaking intensely.

“What is that?” someone amid the crowd shouted.

Everyone quickly turned around, and what they saw left them completely frozen on the spot.

Amidst a huge cloud of dust that had risen outside the Master Teacher Academy, they saw an army of enormous Bluetrunk Elephants charging toward them with astounding momentum.

Those Bluetrunk Elephants each possessed a cultivation of at least Transcendent Mortal 5-dan, and there were several thousand of them in total. Under the lead of a Saint realm 1-dan Bluetrunk Elephant King, their presence seemed to emanate an aura that sent a ripple of fear and panic through the crowd.

As the ground trembled beneath those massive figures, seemingly heralding the end of the world, the hearts of those watching them jolted in fright as well.

“The Bluetrunk Elephants are here too? This will complicate things...”

Seeing that the thick-skinned, massive beasts were there as well, everyone’s complexion worsened.

The aerial spirit beasts were already troublesome foes to deal with by themselves. If they had the support of the Bluetrunk Elephants, who specialized in crushing through formations with the fearsome momentum of their charge, that would make the battle many times more difficult than it already was.

Zhu Chenqing rose up and commanded, “Everyone, get into a defensive formation.”

Huala!

Hearing the orders, the students hurriedly awoke from their daze and quickly got into a defensive formation that would help them cope against the furious charge of the Bluetrunk Elephants.

Aoooo! Aooooo!

But shortly after they got into formation, a piercing howl echoed in the air. Following which, before everyone’s twitching eyes, an army of several thousand Steelfang Wolves charged in under the lead of a Saint realm 1-dan Steelfang Wolf King.

Steelfang Wolves were known for their cunningness and their exceptional ability in collaborating with one another to perform group assaults, making them a troublesome foe to deal with. For several thousands of them to appear simultaneously, it was truly a catastrophe!

“We are doomed...” someone amid the crowd muttered feebly as the faces of those around him warped in despair.

Even Yu Shenqing couldn't help but feel his hairs stand on end from the sheer number of enemies before him.

Even though the old eunuch Luo Fu had said that they would be able to uncover news regarding the results of the negotiation at the Cloudmist Ridge before the inauguration ceremony, there seemed to have been some delays due to unexpected circumstances. As a result, he had no idea what School Head Mo had promised the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge back then.

Roar! Roar! Roar!

As if the heavens were decreeing their doom, before everyone's shocked gazes, a bunch of Scarlet Blaze Lions arrived under the lead of the Saint realm 1-dan Scarlet Blaze Lion King, and just like those before, there were thousands of them as well.

Following shortly behind were the Steelbacked Bear, Tigerhead Beast, Crimsonflame Ape...

Nine of the Ten Indomitable Kings of the Cloudmist Ridge had arrived with thousands of their subordinates, and altogether, they formed an impressive army of several dozen thousand beasts!

In other words, it could be said that the entire force of the Cloudmist Ridge was present at that very moment! It was as if they were declaring that they would eradicate the Master Teacher Academy by hook or by crook that day!

Everyone's face turned ghastly white, and not a single person could find a word to utter.

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“Didn’t the Master Teacher Academy negotiate with the Cloudmist Ridge and receive the latter’s promise to never cause a beast stampede anymore? How did this happen?”

“How can we fight against so many spirit beasts and saint beasts at once?”

“We are doomed!”

“This is probably the greatest crisis the Master Teacher Academy has ever faced since its founding. This is even worse than the war that Principal Mo Liuzhen faced four thousand years ago!”

It took a while before the crowd’s voices finally returned.

With so many saint beasts and spirit beasts surrounding them, even if the Master Teacher Academy were to achieve a victory eventually, it would still suffer devastating damage!

Out of its hundred thousand students, it would be a huge blessing if even a third of them were still alive by the end of this ordeal.

If that were to really happen, this matter would surely go down in history!

It was just a moment earlier that they had been told confidently that the problem of beast stampedes from the Cloudmist Ridge had been resolved once and for all, but such a situation fell upon them in the very next instant. Even if that Zhang Xuan fellow were to successfully be inaugurated as the next principal, he would be nothing more than a figurehead, devoid of any power or authority, and perhaps, he might even be a laughingstock of the world!

“From the challenges by the pavilion masters, it can be seen that Zhang Shi does possess some capability. But faced with such a situation, there is nothing he can do. He can only blame

his misfortune for meeting with such an incident on the day of his inauguration!” One of the emperors sighed in lamentation.

“Indeed. No matter how well he copes with the situation and lowers the casualties to the bare minimum, it doesn’t matter anymore. To be surrounded by so many saint beasts and spirit beasts during his own inauguration ceremony... No matter what he does, he is doomed to go down in history as the most incompetent principal of the Master Teacher Academy!” Zhu Yi also shook his head and he shot a glance at Zhang Xuan with sympathy in his eyes.

The previous performance of the young principal had indeed won his admiration and approval, but it was a pity that fate had toyed with him. No matter how capable a genius the other party was, there was nothing he could do in the face of so many saint beasts and spirit beasts.

Just as Zhu Yi was lamenting over Zhang Xuan’s fate, he suddenly noticed that the commotion in the surroundings had abruptly died down. The breathing of those around him hastened, as if something huge was impending.

Frowning, Zhu Yi asked Yu Shenqing, who was sitting beside him, “What’s wrong?”

“Take a look for yourself!” With a pale face, the emperor of Hongyuan Empire raised a shaky finger to the sky.

“Look at what?”

Bewildered by the other party’s response, Zhu Yi raised his head, and the sight that was reflected in his eyes left his pupils narrowing in shock. His body stiffened, and with a hoarse voice, he exclaimed in astonishment, “W-w-w-what is that?”

He wasn’t the only one who was in such a state. In an instant, the crowd went mute; the training grounds plunged into an eerie silence. Every single one of them had their faces warped in shock, as if they had seen a ghost.

Zhao Bingxu also raised his head to take a look, and he saw that the aerial saint beasts and spirit beasts, at some point in time, had positioned themselves to form massive words that filled the boundless sky for several dozen kilometers.

Every single one of those words was shaped beautifully, reminiscent of a calligraphy masterpiece of a master painter.

“Congratulations to Master for becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy! May you achieve extraordinary accomplishments and your name go down for generations to come... Could it be that they aren't here to cause trouble but to... offer their congratulations?”

Reading those words in the sky, Zhu Yi felt his mind going blank.

He had thought that those spirit beasts and saint beasts would make use of this opportunity to launch a fatal attack on them or even extort them for even more favorable terms... But never in his dreams had he expected that they would form words to offer their congratulations instead!

What was going on?

Hong long!

Before Zhu Yi could recover from his shock, the three kings of the Cloudmist Ridge in the sky abruptly clasped their fists and bowed deeply to Zhang Xuan and said, “Green Bamboo Earth Dragon, White-eared Beast, and Steelscale Beast congratulate Master on becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy. We have prepared 132,000 jin of Cloudmist Flower as a gift for you to celebrate this festive occasion!”

(~66,000kg)

Huala!

As they spoke those words, thirty Half-Saint aerial beasts descended onto the stage with a large chest each in their talons, placing them down gently before opening them.

Weng!

In an instant, the fragrance of tea leaves permeated the area. Mist puffed out from the chests to form a myriad of brilliant colors above them, creating an extraordinarily picturesque sight on the stage that seemed as if it had come out of a beautiful dream.

“This...” Yu Shenqing’s eyes nearly popped out from their sockets, and with quivering lips, he uttered, “These are... supreme grade Cloudmist Flower tea leaves?”

“Cloudmist Flower tea leaves? Isn’t that what you gift us from time to time?” Zhu Yi asked in astonishment.

As the emperor of a neighboring empire, he had the privilege of enjoying tea brewed from the valuable Cloudmist Flower as well. However, due to its limited quantity, he had only been able to drink it a few times despite his esteemed standing.

Even so, that aroma, that flavor, and that texture... they were things that he would never forget in his life.

Just the thought of it left his mouth salivating endlessly.

“What I gifted you?” Yu Shenqing shook his head. “Far from it. What I have given you is just the lowest grade Cloudmist Flower tea leaves. Compared to the ones in those chests, those are nothing more than trash!”

“N-nothing more than trash?” The faces of Zhu Yi and the other emperors turned livid.

Noticing their expressions, Yu Shenqing realized that he had misspoken, so he quickly clarified himself. “Don’t misunderstand! It’s not that I am intentionally sending low grade products to you—those are already the best ones in our royal palace! We simply don’t have the means to procure supreme grade Cloudmist Flower tea leaves!”

“You don’t have the means to procure them?” The other emperors were taken aback.

To think that the most influential person in Hongyuan Empire would have something he would be unable to lay his hands on too?

“In order to reach such a grade, the Cloudmist Flower must be at least two hundred years old and be nourished by the Earth Vein Spirit Essence. After which, it has to be carefully dried for three whole years before it is ready for consumption... In comparison to that, the tea leaves that our royal palace are able to procure only have a maturity of less than three years, so

there is no way they can compare with those,” Yu Shenqing said with a bitter smile.

They were both Cloudmist Flower tea leaves, but there was a vast difference between their quality. Only what was in those chests could be considered as true tea leaves; in comparison to that, those procured by the Hongyuan royal palace were comparable to weeds.

“Tea leaves so valuable that even your Hongyuan royal palace doesn’t have any, and those saint beasts actually gave away more than a hundred thousand jin of them as a gift?” Coming to a realization, Zhu Yi and the other emperors exchanged glances, and they suddenly felt a dryness in their throats. There were no words that could describe the current emotions they were feeling.

As fans, they were aware of the staggering value of the Cloudmist Flower tea leaves. Even the most ordinary and low-grade ones that Yu Shenqing had in his possession was easily worth a fortune!

Yet, to give away more than a hundred thousand jin of the tea leaves so easily...

This was simply way too generous, wasn’t it?

However, before they could recover from their shock, a hearty laughter suddenly boomed in the air, creating resounding echoes throughout the Master Teacher Academy.

“Scarlet Blaze Lion, Steelbacked Bear, and Tigerhead Beast also congratulate Master on becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy. We have prepared thirty chests of spirit medicine and saint medicine as a gift for you to celebrate this festive occasion!”

Huala!

Following which, ten Scarlet Blaze Lions, ten Steelbacked Bears, and ten Tigerhead Beasts walked up to the stage side-by-side. Each of them carried a two-meter wide chest on their backs, and after placing them down gently on the stage, they slowly opened them; a fragrance immediately burst into the air, reaching over ten li away.

(5km)

“This is... Dazzleflower Saint Medicine, Redleaf Saint Medicine, Myriad Chrysanthemum Saint Medicine... Not to mention, there are so many of them... Even if one were to empty out the entire Physician School, it would be impossible to gather so many of them together!”

“That’s not all. Look carefully, there are Greenleaf Flower Stem, Fleeting Fragrance Leaf, Woodbeard Spirit Grass... These medicinal herbs are incredibly rare, and perhaps even the Great Herb King of Hongyuan Empire might not have them!”

“Look, isn’t that the Thousand Gold Flower? Back then, I spent ten years visiting over twenty Tier-1 Empires, but I wasn’t able to find a single one. But this... there is actually half a chest of them here?”

“Is that the... Miniature Heart Devouring Grass? Isn’t that the extraordinarily rare medicinal herb famed as the core ingredient for brewing the ultimate wine that can leave one deeply intoxicated, such that one can even forget the love of their life? When I was younger, in order to forget a relationship, I toured the world to find it, and it took me three entire years just to find one that was three months old... Yet, those in that chest have a maturity of at least several hundred years!”

...

Upon seeing the medicinal herbs in the chests, the master teachers of the Apothecary School and Physician School nearly went insane.

Not only were these medicinal herbs insanely expensive, they were also extremely rare and difficult to find. Yet, those saint beasts actually gave out thirty chests of them in a single go. On top of that, all of the medicinal herbs were of a decent maturity too...

To use those as a congratulation gift...

Were they intending to empty out the Cloudmist Ridge?

“Steelfang Wolf, Bluetrunk Elephant, and Crimsonflame Ape also congratulate Master on becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy. We have prepared thirty chests of ores as a gift for you to celebrate this festive occasion!”

Huala!

Before the crowd could even digest the astounding sight of thirty chests of spirit herbs and saint herbs, the final three kings also stepped forward and presented their gifts loudly.

Hong long long!

Ten Steelfang Wolves, ten Bluetrunk Elephants, and ten Crimsonflame Apes also made their way to the stage, putting down the huge chests on their back carefully and opening them.

Weng!

A ripple spread across the spiritual energy in the air, and a burst of color appeared before everyone’s eyes.

All kinds of rare ores, which the crowd had only heard about but never seen before, appeared before everyone’s eyes.

“Is that the... Bluescar Metal? I heard that this metal is even tougher than Xuan Metal, and weapons forged using the Bluescar Metal will have elegant blue veins running through them. It is said that those weapons are incredibly sharp, allowing one to slice through the flesh of another cleanly, without leaving the slightest bloodstain on the blade.

Innumerable experts would die to just gain possession of a tael of it! For there to be an entire chest of it here... that should be at least several dozen tons, right?”

(A tael = 50g)

“I saw the Bloodseal Ore in one of the chests! If one grinds the ore down and smears it on a blade, even the toughest metal will be easily turned into liquid! Back then, I tried to purchase some of it from the Blacksmith Guild, but I was rejected on the grounds of my rank being too low... Yet, the saint beasts are giving an entire chest of it to Zhang shi?”

“Those are Adamantium Rocks! As long as they are carefully carved, they can become jewels more dazzling than diamonds! Even if its value doesn’t compare to the other ores, surely they don’t have to give away so many chests of it like that!”

“Could those be Snowaccrue Rocks? If cultivators of yin attribute cultivation technique were to carry some on them, their cultivation speed could be boosted significantly...”

...

As soon as those ores appeared, all of the master teachers of the Blacksmith School fell into a frenzy.

As blacksmiths, they were able to recognize the ores in the chests, and they couldn’t help but be astounded by their sheer value. Put all of them together, and the value could easily exceed the wealth of the entire Master Teacher Academy and the Hongyuan royal family!

And yet, these were given away for free to Zhang Shi to serve as congratulatory gifts for his inauguration!

“Zhu Chenqing, didn’t you say that our Master Teacher Academy agreed to humiliating conditions in order to convince the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge to retreat?”

“But these gifts... Even if one were to overturn the entire Master Teacher Academy, it would be impossible to take out so many valuable resources!”

“Not to mention, the Ten Indomitable Kings even delivered the gifts personally with their men!”

...

Those students who had stood up in protest against Zhang Xuan earlier turned their sights to Zhu Chenqing.

Previously, Zhu Chenqing had told them that the Master Teacher Academy had compensated the Cloudmist Ridge with huge wealth just to convince them to retreat so that the inauguration ceremony could carry on without any trouble. It was after hearing his story that they agreed to stand up with him to question the succeeding principal indignantly.

But this... instead of the Master Teacher Academy compensating the Cloudmist Ridge, it was the Cloudmist Ridge that was delivering valuable gifts one after another to them!

No matter how slow they were, it was clear that the ‘agreed to humiliating terms so that the inauguration ceremony could go on without any trouble’, which they had been told, was a lie...

“I-I... How was I supposed to know this?” Zhu Chenqing exclaimed with a trembling body as tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

Considering that it was their side that had proposed the negotiation, and that the negotiation had been conducted in the enemy’s den, where the negotiator could be easily pressured into giving in, the eventual terms decided upon in the negotiation were bound to be shameful and humiliating to them...

Who would have thought that it would turn out to be the complete opposite?

Zhu Chenqing felt as if his sanity was going to snap by the craziness happening around him...

The heck!

Are you sure that you went there to negotiate and not to rob them?

899 Inviting the Predecessors

After a very long moment of silence, someone amid the crowd exclaimed, “Wait! Have you noticed that they addressed Zhang shi as ‘Master’ in their congratulations?”

Overwhelmed by the shock of the gifts, none of them had really noticed it. However, now that they were given some time to process what had just happened, realization suddenly dawned upon them.

“Indeed! They did say ‘congratulations to Master’!”

“For them to call Zhang shi their master, there can only be one possibility... they are his tamed beasts!”

“Wait, doesn’t that mean that Zhang shi... has managed to tame all of the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge? Is that the reason they cleared out their den to prepare these gifts to offer to him during the inauguration ceremony?”

As if a stone dropped into a tranquil lake, a commotion swiftly rippled across the crowd.

As students of the Master Teacher Academy, none of them were fools. It only took them a brief moment to understand the situation before them.

Shocked gazes swiftly turned to the composed, twenty-year-old young man standing on the stage, and the crowd felt as if their minds were about to blow.

This was especially so for the students of the Beast Tamer School. They were completely frenzied by the situation before them.

Just to tame a single spirit beast, they would need to spend several years giving the other party all kinds of treasures and delicacies while putting aside their dignity to fawn over the beast, as if trying to please one’s ancestor...

Yet, the young man on the stage had not only tamed the Byzantium Helios Beast but the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge

as well...

Can you be any more exaggerated than that?

While they were flabbergasted by the situation before them, the several dozen spirit beasts in the air and on ground abruptly bowed down toward the young man on the stage and howled in unison.

“Roar roar roar roar roar...”

“That’s the Ancient Beast Language!” one of the older beast tamers amid the crowd exclaimed.

Someone else hurriedly asked, “Ancient Beast Language? What are they saying?”

It was extremely difficult to learn the Ancient Beast Language, and even among the master teachers of the Master Teacher Academy, there was only a small handful who could understand it.

“I can only make out some of the simpler words...”

The older beast tamer hesitated for an instant before saying, “It seems like they are saying... Congratulations to Master for becoming the principal of the Master Teacher Academy...”

“Master? Wait, it can’t be that... these spirit beasts have been tamed by Zhang shi as well? All of them are his tamed beasts?”

“That seems to be the case...”

“While taming the kings of the Cloudmist Ridge, he conveniently tamed the other spirit beasts as well?”

“Faction leader—wait, it should be Principal Zhang now—sure devastates everything in his path...”

The eyelids of the crowd began twitching uncontrollably once more.

It was just a moment ago that they had thought that the situation was already sufficiently exaggerated, and that was when such a scene occurred before them...

Principal Zhang, are you sure that you are only a 4-star master teacher and not Kong shi in disguise?

In fact, even Kong shi had no record of being able to tame several dozen thousand spirit beasts and saint beasts in a single breath during his younger years.

One of the students of the Beast Tamer School who had participated in the battle was the first to realize the truth.

“It seems like we really got it all wrong this time around. Principal Zhang participated in the negotiations as well, but instead of humbling himself before the beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge and paying a heavy price in order to bring about peace, he went to overturn the other party’s den!”

“Indeed! To run straight into their base to tame the Ten Indomitable Kings and all of the spirit beasts beneath them... With such capability, were negotiations even required?”

“It’s laughable that we actually doubted Principal Zhang! It is no wonder School Head Zhao said that we don’t have to worry about beast stampedes from the Cloudmist Ridge anymore. With all of the spirit beasts and saint beasts becoming Principal Zhang’s tamed beasts, how could a beast stampede possibly occur?”

“The Cloudmist Ridge is a problem that the Master Teacher Academy has been unable to resolve for countless years, and yet, Zhang shi has already resolved it before he was even inaugurated as the principal. If I was one of the Ten Great Master Teachers, I would also have nominated him to be the principal! Who else could possibly be better suited for the role than him?”

After recovering from the shock, a bitter smile surfaced on their faces.

Previously, when they had heard that School Head Mo was proposing a negotiation with the Cloudmist Ridge, they had thought that the Master Teacher Academy was going to be forced into humiliating terms.

But from the looks of it, they had been sorely mistaken. On the contrary, they had even helped to vent the many years of

frustrations of mankind.

Once the news spread, the entire Qingyuan Conferred Empire would find their lower jaws dropping in astonishment as well.

“He actually managed to tame all of them...”

Watching the sight before him, Zhu Chenqing’s eyes reddened in agitation.

His greatest goal had always been to exact vengeance for his family, and with all of the beasts submitting to Zhang shi, he could finally let go of this grudge.

“Principal Zhang, thank you!” Kneeling to the ground, Zhu Chenqing expressed his earnest gratitude toward Zhang Xuan.

“Alright, all of you may leave now!” After accepting all of the gifts, Zhang Xuan rubbed his glabella.

He had no idea that the spirit beasts and saint beasts would cause such a huge ruckus during the inauguration ceremony!

If he had known in advance, he would have surely stopped them from messing around like that!

While it was true that their actions had indeed won him some prestige, he still couldn’t help but feel stifled within.

As the saying goes, ‘flaunting one’s wealth is nothing short of foolishness’. How hard would it have been for you to have passed those gifts to me discreetly? But to present them as congratulatory gifts in the middle of the inauguration ceremony, isn’t that as good as telling everyone in the academy that I have struck it rich?

“Yes!” Nodding, the Scarlet Blaze Lion swiftly led the spirit beasts and saint beasts out of the Master Teacher Academy.

Watching the spirit beasts and saint beasts leaving orderly on command, the master teachers in the area couldn’t help but feel a surge of admiration.

With such a principal leading them, it would just be a matter of time before the academy rose through the ranks!

Seeing that Principal Zhang had managed to win everyone over, Zhao Bingxu chuckled softly and said, “Alright, if no

one else has any questions, we shall proceed on to the next formality, paying respects to the predecessors!”

“We are willing to recognize Zhang Shi as the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy!” the crowd hurriedly responded.

The young man on the stage had already shown outstanding character, professionalism, exceptional teaching capability, deep knowledge of cultivation, and magnanimity to them. They would only be embarrassing themselves if they challenged such a man further.

“Good. Invite the predecessors!” Zhao Bingxu announced loudly.

Inviting the predecessors to witness the inauguration of the principal was a convention of the Master Teacher Academy. In this formality, the succeeding principal would seek the recognition of the preceding principals.

While this might sound similar to how the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall worked, there was a significant difference between the two.

In the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall, master teachers would seek the acknowledgement from the wills of the outstanding predecessors of the Master Teacher Pavilion, and the more predecessors who acknowledged them, the greater one’s accomplishments were likely to be in the future.

On the other hand, in this formality of the inauguration ceremony, the succeeding principal would be seeking the recognition from the wills of the preceding principals. The greater the number of principals that recognized the succeeding principal, the greater the authority and power the succeeding principal would obtain in the Master Teacher Academy.

The Master Teacher Academy wasn’t as simple as it looked on the surface. There were many deeper secrets to it that even an esteemed school head like Zhao Bingxu was unqualified to learn of.

Hong long!

As Zhao Bingxu's words echoed in the air, a massive formation inscribed onto the stage began whirring into action, and the sky abruptly darkened, as if an ominous cloud had concealed the sun.

“What is going on?”

This was the first time that most of the students had witnessed this formality, so they couldn't help but be unnerved by the bizarre happenings around them.

Didn't School Head Zhao say that he would invite the predecessors? Why would the sky suddenly darken?

“Don't worry, I was present in the inauguration ceremony of the old principal, and this was the exact same situation that happened then as well!” An elder stroked his beard and said, “By predecessors, it actually refers to the wills that the preceding principals left behind in the academy. As these wills exist in a form similar to souls, they are unable to move around in the sunlight, so a formation must be activated to conceal the sun before the predecessors can be summoned!”

One of the students couldn't help but ask curiously, “Soul? Is that the means of a soul oracle?”

“Means of a soul oracle? Of course not! The means of the soul oracles are extremely sinister and callous, consisting of methods to lengthen one's lifespan through possessing the bodies of others and turning living bodies into Soulless Metal Humanoids. On the other hand, the methods our Master Teacher Pavilion uses are upright and orthodox!” the elder replied disdainfully.

“Then...” The student was confused.

According to what he knew, only soul oracles had to avoid the sunlight, confined in the shades of darkness.

“These predecessors are the wills left behind by the preceding generations of principals, and naturally, they can't be compared with mere soul oracles! If you don't believe me, just take a look yourself...”

Shortly after the elder said those words, a huge gust of wind blew, and the vague silhouette of an elder materialized above

the stage.

This elder had a square face, and a hint of valiantness seemed to be etched into his glabella, granting him a majestic and authoritative disposition.

Unlike the cold and sinister aura that soul oracles usually carried, his presence felt upright and warm.

Upon seeing the elder, Zhang Xuan couldn't help but frown.

Just like the other students, he had also been wondering whether or not the predecessors had used the means of soul oracles in order to sustain themselves, as a duration of ten millenniums was more than sufficient to dissipate the soul of even the most capable master teacher.

However, after seeing the elder, he realized that the predecessors existed in a form strikingly similar to the young Kong shi he had met at the Saint Acknowledgement Platform.

He wasn't too sure about the details, but the soul felt upright, devoid of the disquieting aura characteristic of a soul oracle.

But of course, existing in such a form had its own disadvantages as well. For one, the soul before him didn't seem to be complete, which impeded it from exerting significant power.

On top of that, soul oracles often possessed their full consciousness, but the soul of the master teacher before him could only be said to be a sliver of will, similar to the state that Vicious was in at the moment.

“Judging from his appearance and aura, it seems like he is the first principal of the Master Teacher Academy, Mu shi!”

Unlike Zhang Xuan's questioning gaze, the eyes of the teachers and students of the Master Teacher Academy lit up upon seeing the elder.

The founder of the Master Teacher Academy appearing before their eyes, how could they not be excited?

It might just be an incomplete soul, but it harnessed his will within it!

Hu hu hu hu!

Shortly after Mu Kai appeared, several dozen more figures flickered into existence as well.

Even though their silhouettes looked extremely faint, they harnessed a powerful aura that exerted great pressure on those before them.

As students and teachers of the Master Teacher Academy, they were expected to remember the history of the Master Teacher Academy. Besides, those who were able to become the principal of the Master Teacher Academy in their generation possessed capability surpassing that of their peers, making them figures of admiration among students and teachers alike.

Seeing so many of their idols appearing simultaneously, the atmosphere in the training grounds was about to burst through the sky.

“Is that Principal Liu Changyuan from the seventh generation? I have been studying his ‘Changyuan Great Sorrow Palm’ and ‘Thousand Leaves Revolution Palm’ for the past few years...”

“That must be Principal Mo Liuzhen! As expected of the one famed for possessing the greatest talent among all of the principals; just his presence seems to hint at the boundless might he possesses!”

“Principal Mo Liuzhen is indeed strong, but it’s a pity that he entered the Subterranean Gallery in order to push himself to make a breakthrough to becoming an 8-star master teacher and never returned. His death is truly one of the greatest loss to the Master Teacher Pavilion...”

“My idol is Principal Zhu Xuanqing of the 79th generation. Even though he never managed to become a 7-star master teacher in his lifetime, he specialized in a total of 12 supporting occupations and compiled his insights into each of them in great detail, leaving behind an incredible trove of knowledge for the generations to come...”

...

The many master teachers in the training grounds couldn’t help but feel their hearts leaping in excitement.

Hu hu!

Amidst the discussions of the crowd, a total of 102 figures had materialized on the stage.

Zhang Xuan frowned. “102? Why don’t I see the old principal anywhere?”

900 Won't You Allow Me to Pummel You?

Every single generation of principal had left behind a sliver of their will in the Master Teacher Academy. Even if the principal of the previous generation had gone missing abruptly, considering that this was part of the heritage of the Master Teacher Academy, he should have entrusted a sliver of his will with the Master Teacher Academy as well.

Why wasn't the old principal anywhere to be seen then?

Noticing Zhang Xuan's doubts, Zhao Bingxu explained to him through zhenqi telepathy, "The old principal... He went missing before he could accrue sufficient contributions to enter the Mausoleum of Principals, so he couldn't leave his will behind..."

"Contribution?" Zhang Xuan was perplexed by the term.

"The Master Teacher Pavilion has a record of each master teacher's accomplishments, and these accomplishments are then quantified in the form of 'contributions'. Each generation of principal has to achieve a certain level of contributions before they are given permission to enter the Mausoleum of Principals!

"Basically, anything that is beneficial to mankind can be considered a contribution. Imparting knowledge so as to allow more cultivators to grow stronger is a contribution; killing Otherworldly Demons and ridding mankind of the underlying threat is a contribution; creating new cultivation techniques and battle techniques and spreading them far and wide so that mankind can reach greater heights is a contribution as well," Zhao Bingxu clarified with a smile.

"Principal Zhang, your act of taming the spirit beasts and saint beasts of the Cloudmist Ridge has spared mankind from a possible disaster in the future, and the Master Teacher Pavilion

considers it a huge contribution as well. Just that in itself should qualify you to enter the Mausoleum of Principals!”

The Cloudmist Ridge had always been a huge threat to the Master Teacher Academy, and despite going through over a hundred principals, the problem had still continued to persist. Facing such a problem, not only did Principal Zhang manage to resolve the problem once and for all, he even effectively turned the forces of the Cloudmist Ridge into the forces of the Master Teacher Academy. With such an accomplishment, even if his contribution was still beneath that of the founder of the Master Teacher Academy, it was definitely sufficient to go down in history for countless years to come.

“I have made sufficient contributions?” Zhang Xuan was stunned by the abrupt news.

“Of course!” Zhao Bingxu nodded with an indescribable expression.

Other principals had to toil laboriously day after day, doing whatever they could do that was beneficial to mankind in order to accrue sufficient contributions to enter the Mausoleum of Principals.

The current principal was probably the only one in the many generations of principals to achieve sufficient contributions despite not knowing what it was.

If the previous principals were to learn about this matter, would they spurt a mouthful of blood and start cursing furiously?

Sometimes, it was the difference between fellow men that was the most frustrating.

Oblivious to School Head Zhao’s thoughts, Zhang Xuan continued asking, “What is the Mausoleum of Principals?”

“The Mausoleum of Principals is where the wills of the principals are nurtured, as well as where their bodies are kept after their deaths. Thus, it can be said to be the resting place of the previous principals of the Master Teacher Academy.”

“So, it is like a tomb for the principals.” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

Judging from School Head Zhao's words, it seemed like not every principal was qualified to be buried in there. Only those who had made sufficient contributions were allowed to rest there after their deaths.

Most likely, there is something special about the tomb... Zhang Xuan thought doubtfully.

If it was just an ordinary tomb, there was no need to restrict even the principals themselves from entering. Since there was such a strict restriction imposed on it, there was probably more to it than meets the eye.

Just as Zhang Xuan was contemplating this matter, the wills of the principals suddenly turned their eyes over to him.

"You are the principal of this generation?" An authoritative voice echoed through the air.

The one who had spoken was the founder of the Hongyuan Master Teacher Academy, Mu Kai.

Mu Kai had a very gentle and elegant air around him, and his eyes carried no hint of underestimation or disdain for Zhang Xuan just because of the latter's young age. On the contrary, he nodded in commendation, expressing his approval for Zhang Xuan instead.

"For one of your age to receive the recognition of so many students and elders, it seems like you are a person of exceptional capability."

Naturally, the eye of discernment of the man who had founded the Master Teacher Academy was anything but ordinary.

When others only noticed Zhang Xuan's young age and inexperience, the founder of the Master Teacher Academy saw his potential.

For a person of his age to be chosen as the principal of the Master Teacher Academy, that could only mean that he possessed certain capabilities that surpassed all other competitors.

"Even under the protection of the formation, the time that we can remain existent here is limited. Use three sentences to

introduce yourself, your strengths, and capabilities. We will use it as a gauge to determine whether you are worthy of our approval or not!” Mu Kai said with a smile.

“Three sentences?” Not expecting to be given such a challenge, Zhang Xuan frowned.

He had thought that he would be kneeling to beseech the preceding principals for their acknowledgement, similar to how it was in the Teacher Acknowledgement Hall. However, from the looks of it, it didn't seem to be that simple.

He was given an opportunity to speak, but this only served to heighten the difficulty of the test.

This opportunity could also be considered a test from the preceding principals, so he would have to proceed with caution.

Just as Zhang Xuan was musing over his words, Zhao Bingxu suddenly sent a telepathic message to him. “Principal Zhang, you must think it through carefully! The number of acknowledgements you receive from the principals will determine the degree of authority you will wield in the academy!”

“Degree of authority?”

“Un. There are certain places in the Master Teacher Academy that even the principal won't be able to enter without possessing a certain degree of authority in the academy.”

“I see!” Zhang Xuan nodded in realization.

In essence, the principal was not the true master of the Master Teacher Academy but a master teacher nominated by the Ten Great Master Teachers to manage the affairs of the Master Teacher Academy temporarily. Naturally, the principal wasn't given free rein over everything in the academy.

The greater degree of authority one commanded, the greater one's control over the academy would be.

“As long as you receive twenty percent of the predecessors' recognition, you will be deemed qualified to take over as the next principal of the Master Teacher Academy and receive the

Elementary Jurisdiction. If you receive forty percent, you will be granted the Intermediate Jurisdiction. Sixty percent, you will be granted Advanced Jurisdiction, and eighty percent, Supreme Jurisdiction. If you receive Supreme Jurisdiction over the Master Teacher Academy, you will gain total control over all of the major formations, access the most confidential books in the academy, and even gain free access to the Mausoleum of Principals without needing the required contribution.”

Access the most confidential books in the academy? Zhang Xuan’s eyes lit up.

The main reason he had agreed to be the principal in the first place was due to the principal’s privilege in accessing the books in the academy. However, judging from Zhao Bingxu’s words, it seemed that he would still be unable to access some books if he didn’t obtain the Supreme Jurisdiction.

If that was the case, he would just have to obtain the Supreme Jurisdiction.

But in order to achieve that, he would need to find the right words to convince over eighty percent of the preceding principals to recognize him within three sentences, and that was easier said than done.

While the founder of the Master Teacher Academy, Mu Kai, might have a positive view of him, not all of the principals shared the same opinion.

After all, there was simply nothing praiseworthy about Zhang Xuan’s age, cultivation, and master teacher rank.

To change their minds of him within just three sentences—difficult!

Zhang Xuan couldn’t help but ask Zhao Bingxu, “What percentage of recognition did the old principal receive?”

“The old principal was only a 6-star pinnacle master teacher when he took over as the principal, barely meeting the mark, so he only received 22% of the preceding principals’ recognition,” Zhao Bingxu replied.

“Most of the preceding principals received the Elementary Jurisdiction in this formality. Out of the 103 preceding principals, less than thirty has received the Intermediate Jurisdiction, less than ten for the Advanced Jurisdiction, and only one for the Supreme Jurisdiction, which was the founder, Mu shi himself!”

“Only one for the Supreme Jurisdiction?” Zhang Xuan was astonished.

It seemed like the test was far harder than he had thought.

Each of the preceding principals were top-notch experts in their era; receiving their earnest recognition and commendation was truly no easy task.

Besides, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What one views to be perfect might be worth nothing in the eyes of others.

There were master teachers in this world who specialized in more than a dozen supporting occupations, achieving an incredible mastery in each of them. Logically speaking, a person that capable should receive the respect and admiration of others.

However, there were also those who thought that a master teacher should focus their efforts on teaching others. The fact that a master teacher had achieved such deep mastery in every field only meant that they weren't devoted in their primary responsibility, so they weren't worthy of respect.

“Indeed! In this formality, the fewer preceding principals there are, the easier it is to receive a substantial percentage of their recognition. With more than a hundred preceding principals here, it will be extremely difficult to gain a sufficient proportion of their support to obtain higher degrees of authority!” Zhao Bingxu said.

Receiving the recognition of just one or two principals was relatively simpler with an outstanding performance and sufficient luck. However, to win the goodwill of over a hundred people at once, that was nigh impossible.

Thus, the three sentences he would speak were of grave importance.

What words could help him convince all of them?

Zhang Xuan fell into deep thought.

...

The master teachers beneath the stage also swiftly came to realize the difficulty behind Founder Mu Kai's request as well, and anxiety emerged in their eyes.

One of the students turned to his good friend beside him and asked, "What do you think Zhang shi will say?"

"Zhang shi is a man of great talent; it is beyond my means to fathom what he could possibly say. However, given his capability, I believe it shouldn't be too difficult for him to win the recognition of most predecessors!" The good friend happened to be a diehard fan of Zhang Xuan, so he possessed unwavering confidence in the latter.

One of the master teachers who had a deep understanding of the history of the academy said, "I'm afraid that it won't be that easy. Even the unbelievably talented Principal Mo Yanqing back then only managed to obtain a 71% recognition from the preceding principals. I believe that Principal Zhang's talent is nowhere beneath Principal Mo's, but his talent has yet to manifest itself fully. If Principal Zhang was given a few dozen more years, I have no doubt that he would be able to surpass the results of the preceding principals easily. However, in his current state... I fear that it won't be that easy!"

"Indeed, it is unlikely for Zhang shi to do too well in this. I heard that our old principal didn't do well in this formality either, achieving a recognition of only 22%," another student added.

Considering how the old principal had managed to tame the Byzantium Helios Beast and had been on the verge of a breakthrough to becoming a 7-star master teacher, there was little that had to be said about his talent and capability.

Yet, such an expert only received 22% of the preceding principals' recognition. This went to show how difficult this formality was.

“Whether one would be able to receive the recognition of the preceding principals depended highly on one’s capability, character affinity, and luck. It will be difficult to display the full extent of one’s capability with just three sentences, but if Zhang shi pulls it off well, he might manage to achieve something unexpected. Otherwise, it will probably just be a close pass!” An elder shook his head upon hearing their conversation, when he suddenly pointed forward and said, “Look, Zhang shi is about to begin speaking!”

The crowd hurriedly turned their gazes to the stage and saw Zhang Xuan raising his gaze to face the wills of the 102 preceding principals!

It might seem as if the conversation with Zhao Bingxu and the conversation among the master teachers below the stage had occurred over a long period of time, but all in all, only ten breaths had passed.

Seeing that the succeeding principal had prepared himself in such a short period of time, they couldn’t help but wait with bated breaths to hear what he had to say.

Zhao Bingxu also turned his gaze to Zhang Xuan as he stroked his beard.

He had already said all that had to be said. All that was left was to see how Zhang shi would create yet another miracle and overturn everyone’s view once more.

“My name is Zhang Xuan!” With a soft chuckle, Zhang Xuan first introduced himself.

Hearing those words, the wills of the preceding principals nodded in agreement.

It might seem as if he had wasted a sentence, but this was a display of his respect toward them and toward himself as well. It was polite and respectful, devoid of the usual arrogance that a complacent young man in his position would have.

On top of that, his composed disposition also highlighted the absolute confidence he had in himself. It seemed like the young principal was truly not simple!

Just as the wills of the preceding principals were still nodding in approval at Zhang Xuan's first sentence, the latter suddenly scratched his head awkwardly and asked with his face reddened in embarrassment, "That... As preceding principals of the Master Teacher Academy, I believe you are benevolent and magnanimous... Since that's the case, won't you allow me to pummel you?"

"He wants to pummel them?"

Everyone in the crowd, who had pricked up their ears to listen intently to what that was being said, couldn't help but fall into a state of disbelief.