

## My Master 371

### Chapter 371: I'm Really Not Here to Argue\_6

Elder Huan Kong sneered coldly and ceased his secretive communication with Lin Xuefeng, instead, turning to the others and saying, "Fellow Peak Masters, it has been quite some time since I last left my sect. I am not very knowledgeable about the outside world. May I ask what areas of expertise the two Peak Masters possess?"

Areas of expertise?

Cao Zhen felt somewhat puzzled. Why are you asking what I'm good at? Although he found it strange, he couldn't very well not respond, given the other party's enthusiasm.

After some thought, he listed his skills: "My skills are quite varied, and I can't say I excel in them, but I know a little bit of everything, such as alchemy, talisman making, mechanical techniques, formations, and the Six Arts of [Agriculture]... military law, poetry, lyrics, songs, prose, and the dao of calligraphy and painting."

As he spoke, he recalled his previous connection with Gao Jianli and added, "Oh, and there is the path of musical rhythm. I also understand a little bit about that."

When you're out and about, it's still better to keep a low profile.

"Oh? Peak Master Cao, you are indeed a rare talent," Elder Huan Kong commented with a burst of laughter, his heart filled with silent mirth. As expected, everything is just as I thought; this Peak Master is here to deceive others.

Who can truly master so many fields?

The more he claims to know, the less seriously others will take him.

If we aren't well-prepared on our side and face his disciples, those who have truly come to debate the Dao might suffer a great disadvantage.

Unfortunately for them, I am in charge of the debating this time, and I have already made thorough preparations. Their tricks will not work.

While laughing, he turned to Lan Pili and asked, "May I ask what Peak Master Lan is skilled in?"

Lan Pili was speechless upon hearing Cao Zhen's words. Peak Master Cao, why are you running off at the mouth so much? Aren't we just here to buy some materials? You're so casual with your words.

In response to Elder Huan Kong's inquiry, he humbly waved his hand and said, "I wouldn't say I'm skilled, but I do have a certain understanding of the Six Arts of [Agriculture]."

[Agriculture]?

Cao Zhen looked at Lan Pili with some surprise. He didn't know that Lan Pili specialized in [Agriculture].

It turns out that although he had never studied the Six Arts of [Agriculture], he had connected with the earth, so this path of [Agriculture] could truly be considered his specialty.

Elder Huan Kong nodded slightly. As an elder of Thousand Caves Door, he naturally had a deep understanding of Hundred Peaks Sect. He was aware of the specialties of each peak in Hundred Peaks Sect.

He didn't recognize Lan Pili, but he knew that this person was the former Peak Master of Lightning Peak, Tian Pili, who specialized in the Six Arts of [Agriculture]. It was after Tian Pili that Lightning Peak began to inherit the tradition of [Agriculture].

In fact, Lightning Peak was previously ranked after the ninety-fifth peak.

It was Tian Pili who introduced the path of [Agriculture] to Lightning Peak, and by virtue of this Six Art, Lightning Peak managed to secure some positions in the great competition of Hundred Peaks and rose slightly in ranking.

Perhaps Lightning Peak's ranking isn't high, but they do have some merit in the path of [Agriculture].

So Peak Master Cao is here to confuse others, whereas Lan Pili is likely someone who truly came to debate the Dao.

However, the path of [Agriculture] is something that in previous years, Thousand Caves Door was not really skilled in, but this year, it's a different story altogether.

With a judgment formed in his heart, Elder Huan Kong's gaze shifted to the disciples standing behind the two men and asked, "May I know which peaks the disciples belong to, and what are their specializations?"

The disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect, though perplexed, began to answer one after another.

"Immortal Pen Peak, Chang Tiance, specializes in the Calligraphy Dao."

Elder Huan Kong nodded slightly. Indeed, his guess had been correct. Immortal Pen Peak did not rank within the top fifty of the Hundred Peaks Sect; the latest ranking was sixty-two.

However, Immortal Pen Peak specialized in the Calligraphy Dao. Presumably, Chang Tiance was the disciple of the Hundred Points Sect most proficient in calligraphy.

"Disciple, Zither Music Peak ..."

As Cao Zhen listened to one disciple after another from the Hundred Peaks Sect discuss what they were good at, he felt something was increasingly amiss.

All they had come for was to purchase some items, yet the other party continuously inquired about what he and the disciples excelled in...

Could it be that they intended to engage in a debate with them?

No sooner had this thought arisen than Elder Huan Kong's voice rang out, "Having learned what each of you excels at, why don't we begin our debate, my Dao Companions?"

As he spoke, he first turned to Chang Tiance, "This disciple is skilled in the Dao of Calligraphy, so shall we start with calligraphy?"

Cao Zhen was completely at a loss for words. The people from Thousand Caves Door really wanted to debate!

He just wanted to buy some materials; he didn't have time to linger here. It would be better to clarify matters.

Thinking this, he secretly transmitted a message to Lan Pili, "Old Lan, they've misunderstood us. What are these people from Thousand Caves Door thinking? They don't even ask for clarification. Seeing us arrive, they assume we're here to debate.

Don't they know that we are preparing to send an emissary delegation to the Capital City? Couldn't they have considered that? And yet they jump straight to debating! You are the chief envoy; you should make things clear to them. Let's just buy what we need and leave."

"Actually, we can't really blame them," Lan Pili helplessly responded. "They should be aware that we would send an emissary delegation. But under normal circumstances, we wouldn't pass by their Thousand Caves Door on our way to the Capital City. We took two detours, making a wide loop before we arrived here. Thus, their assumption that we've come for a debate is natural. This oversight was my mistake.

However, backing down is absolutely out of the question!

They've already suggested a debate. If we claim now that we didn't come for debate, others might think our Hundred Peaks Sect is afraid of their Thousand Caves Door!

For the sake of our sect's reputation, we cannot back down no matter what.

Even though we are few in number, we still must uphold the dignity of the Hundred Peaks Sect.

Besides, aren't you here?"

Lan Pili added, after a brief pause, with an air of speechlessness in his secret transmission, "But really, Old Cao, why did you mention you were good at so many things? Because of that, they will have more areas to challenge us in.

And you're actually skilled in swordsmanship, respected by Wu Jianzi of the Sword Sect himself. Why didn't you say you were proficient in swordsmanship?"

Cao Zhen didn't respond; he was actually relieved he hadn't mentioned an expertise in the Sword Dao.

He had been able to beat Wu Jianzi because Wu Jianzi was strong enough for Cao Zhen to convince him to persuade himself.

The people from Thousand Caves Door were nowhere near Wu Jianzi's level; if they really did debate swordsmanship with him, after Cao Zhen's long spiel, they still wouldn't be able to convince themselves, and that would be a disaster.

Lan Pili grumbled in frustration but began to ponder how to find an opportunity to claim that Peak Master Cao was skilled in swordsmanship.

If Cao Zhen could win a swordsmanship debate against Wu Jianzi, even making Wu Jianzi accept Cao Zhen as a Pathfinder, wouldn't it be easy for Peak Master Cao to prevail in a debate of swordsmanship against Thousand Caves Door?

They definitely needed to include swordsmanship.

Chapter 372: A Discussion of Dao Resulting from a Mix-up\_1

Thousand Caves Door, truly encompassing a thousand caverns.

Apart from a few where disciples abound, most caverns have few disciples.

But even if there are few disciples, even if there's only one, it can constitute a cavern.

Through tens of thousands of years, the Thousand Caves Door, like the top ten Immortal Sects, has similarly experienced turmoil, even facing cataclysms.

However, ever since the Ancestral Elder established the Thousand Caves Door, out of a thousand caverns, not one has ever ceased its lineage!

Even when facing the greatest of cataclysms, each cavern must preserve a line of succession.

Such is the rule of the Thousand Caves Door.

Similarly, the Hundred Peaks Sect has done the same; since its founding, none of the hundred peaks have ever broken their lineage.

This is also why the Hundred Peaks Sect and the Thousand Caves Door, despite their continuous competition for the title of number one among the Mixed Clan of Immortal Sects, actually share many commonalities.

Debate platforms work in the same way.

When the two grand Immortal Sects hold debates, each of their peaks, or their caverns, sets up a debate platform.

Those who come to debate must proceed to each platform one by one.

Lan Pili and Cao Zhen, while leading a group of disciples to the debate platform of the Thousand Caves Door that specialized in the Dao of Calligraphy, whispered, "The Thousand Caves Door really has no shame. Take our Hundred Peaks Sect, for instance, with a total of one hundred peaks, when others come to debate, they would only visit five or six, or maybe seven or eight platforms at most. Exceptionally, they might go to more than ten peaks to debate. As for something like Military Law, one would only need to visit Military God Peak for debate."

"Then look at the Thousand Caves Door, with their thousands of caverns; anyone who comes to them for debate has to visit dozens of platforms, and sometimes even up to a hundred peaks. In doing so, merely traveling to each debate platform can eat up quite a bit of time."

Cao Zhen nodded his head in agreement, seeing it as a problem indeed. If they really were members of a debate team, it would be all right since they were there to debate anyway.

But the problem was, they were on their way to Capital City to attend the new emperor's grand ceremony, and they could not afford to linger here for too long and waste time.

In a while, they would have to discuss with Elder Huan Kong and ideally set a fixed location for everyone to come for debate together; otherwise, it would be anyone's guess how long the debate would last.

It wasn't long before the group reached a debate platform.

The platform was not small, but around it were few disciples, just over ten dressed in the garb of Thousand Caves Door, fewer even than the people from the Hundred Peaks Sect.

Lin Xuefeng quickly stepped forward to introduce, "Gentlemen, this is Disciple Chang Tiance of the Hundred Peaks Sect's Immortal Pen Peak, skilled in the Calligraphy Dao. May I ask which brother is interested in discussing calligraphy with Dao Companion Chang?"

As his voice fell, among the ten or so people opposite, one averagely-looking disciple with exceptionally pale skin stepped forward and saluted Chang Tiance, "Foremost disciple of Mad Grass Cave, Yan Kuangren."

Until now, Chang Tiance was still somewhat stunned. Weren't they supposed to be a delegation heading to Capital City for homage? How had they suddenly become members of a debate team?

It wasn't until the other's words reached his ears that he snapped back to reality.

It was time for debate—wasn't this an opportunity for him to showcase his skills?

He had once gained Enlightenment in the Hidden Dragon Immortal Palace because of Peak Master Cao, and his knowledge in the Calligraphy Dao had progressed, but he had been in the Hidden Dragon Immortal Palace when the debate team was being selected.

His mentor was unaware of his substantial improvement in the Calligraphy Knowledge, so he had not recommended him to try out, missing the debate team selection.

Later, when a disciple from the Pen and Ink Sect, Qing Mozi, came to the Hundred Peaks Sect for a debate, not to mention him, even his mentor had some trouble coping, eventually having to seek Peak Master Cao's help.

Ever since his calligraphy greatly improved, he hadn't had a chance to display it.

To think that joining an envoy group would afford him an opportunity to debate, and Peak Master Cao was here! Chang Tiance walked onto the platform while glancing in Cao Zhen's direction, thinking it was time to let Peak Master Cao see his progress. If Peak Master Cao provided him with more guidance... his trip would be truly profitable!

Yan Kuangren, seeing Chang Tiance ascend the platform, simply turned around, took out a sheet of paper filled with words and offered it, "This piece of calligraphy is my recent work; I would appreciate your critique, brother."

Chang Tiance expected no surprise; debates in the Dao of Calligraphy usually don't involve speech but directly communicating through one's work.

Some of these works were created on the spot, while others had been prepared beforehand.

Not having witnessed the other's creation process needed no concern; disciples of the top ten Immortal Sects all possess their pride and wouldn't simply claim others' calligraphy as their own.

He took the paper, looked up, and saw that many disciples from the Hundred Peaks Sect were also curiously stretching their necks to see. Upon inspection, many of them furrowed their brows.

Such chaotic writing.

The writing appeared excessively disordered to the point they could hardly discern all the characters.

However, although the writing was chaotic, they felt it was quite well done, even possessing a pleasing quality.

Mad grass.

Chang Tiance nodded slightly, being a disciple of the Hundred Peaks Sect and specifically of the Immortal Pen Peak; he was familiar with the caves of the Thousand Caves Door that practiced the Dao of Calligraphy. The Thousand Caves Door had a total of thirty-six caves that were adept at the Dao of Calligraphy, with twelve of them specializing in it, each in a different script.

The Mad Grass Cave's specialty was precisely mad grass script.

Chang Tiance looked at each character before him and nodded lightly again; mad grass was also his specialty.

After surveying the characters, he looked up at Yan Kuangren and saluted, "Brother, your characters are grand and full of vigor, with wild strength and unpredictable changes, and an endless continuity—truly remarkable."

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Yan Kuangren's face revealed a smug expression. The character he had written was from a couple of days ago when he and two fellow disciples drank heavily. At the height of their revelry, feeling inspired, he had written this character. It also represented the pinnacle of his calligraphy studies to date.

Even now, if he were to write it again, it would be difficult for him to reproduce such unbridled and bold strokes, filled with heroic spirit.

As Chang Tiance spoke, he paused briefly, then took two steps forward and said in a low voice, "However, this character is still somewhat constrained and not wild and free enough!"

If it had been before, he would have only been able to admire such writing, feeling inferior.

But it was precisely because of Peak Master Cao's character that he gained enlightenment. Afterwards, he saw Peak Master Cao's characters several more times. Although he didn't experience enlightenment on those later occasions, he did gain many insights, and the text before him now was full of flaws in his eyes.

Yan Kuangren's expression changed abruptly, he said dissatisfiedly, "Not wild and free enough? This writing was done after I was drunk. If even this is not free enough, then I would like to know what kind of writing truly qualifies as wild and free!"

Chang Tiance glanced at Cao Zhen and, seeing that Peak Master Cao had no intention of speaking, continued, "May I ask Elder Brother, does studying the Dao of Calligraphy not begin with copying?"

"Of course it does," Yan Kuangren glared back at Chang Tiance and retorted, "Could it be that Elder Brother Chang, your study of Calligraphy Knowledge didn't start with copying?"

"Naturally, I too started with copying," Chang Tiance replied, extending a finger, "But copying always follows specific routes.

In fact, whatever text we write, when we study, it's all calligraphy. The character '法' (fa) for 'law' in 'Calligraphy' suggests following something.

What is this '法' (law)? It is the so-called rules.

Everything must follow the rules.

No matter which style of writing, after learning it, we follow the rules of that style.

But what have you written, Elder Brother? It's Mad grass!

What is Mad grass?

Mad grass is about breaking!

Breaking everything, shattering all shackles!

If one wishes to write Mad grass, then one must be completely unorthodox, or to put it another way, completely without orthodoxy.

Elder Brother, your writing is too fixated on orthodoxy. Therefore, I say your characters are not wild and bold enough. Because, Elder Brother, you are still within that frame, while those who succeed break all shackles."

While Chang Tiance was speaking, he glanced again at Cao Zhen. His own previous writing had been too rigid, penned within the framework of cursive script.

It was only after seeing Peak Master Cao's characters that he began to understand what real cursive script was. Real cursive should be unrestrained and limitlessly bold!

Cao Zhen looked at Chang Tiance with some surprise. This youngster was skilled with words, capable of the same bluster and mystification that he himself employed.

It seemed that Yan Kuangren had never considered this problem before. At his words, Yan found himself at a loss for what to say.

Behind them, another disciple from Mad Grass Cave couldn't accept this and called out, "Anyone can speak with their mouth. However, I wonder if Elder Brother's writing has reached such a degree of breaking free from shackles and shattering everything?"

"My writing naturally hasn't reached that level," Chang Tiance said, looking at Cao Zhen again before adding, "However, since everyone wishes to see, then I will embarrass myself this once."

When he mentioned embarrassing himself, it was not about doing so in front of everyone, but rather in front of Peak Master Cao.

After all, anyone writing characters before Peak Master Cao, displaying calligraphy, would be embarrassing themselves.

Up till now among all the people he had met, including all the calligraphy works he had seen, only Peak Master Cao's characters, Peak Master Cao's Mad grass had reached the stage of breaking everything, unlocking all shackles to an extent of following one's heart.

He was still far from that level; he was merely following the path paved by Peak Master Cao.

Chang Tiance collected his thoughts, raised his hand, and picked up the brush he had prepared earlier to start writing.

In no time, black characters began appearing on the xuan paper.

Yan Kuangren and the crowd of disciples moved forward to take a look.

Instantly, the brows of the Mad Grass Peak's disciples furrowed tightly. This writing was indeed much more unrestrained and bold than Yan Kuangren's.

From behind, Elder Huan Kong stared at the xuan paper in everyone's hands, and upon taking a closer look, his expression subtly changed. The fact that he had been chosen to lead the Thousand Caves Door disciples in discourse was because he was one of the rare individuals within the sect who was well-versed in all spheres. Although he did not follow the Dao of Calligraphy, he understood it, and the text before him, in terms of artistic conception alone, was much stronger than Yan Kuangren's.

The people of the Hundred Peaks Sect had indeed come prepared. He had not been wrong in his thinking—the sect masters of the Hundred Peaks Sect were just a distraction. The real participants in the discourse were these disciples.

Meanwhile, Cao Zhen, seeing the silent crowd from Thousand Caves Door, took the opportunity during this lull to approach Elder Huan Kong quickly, proposing, "Elder Huan Kong, we have many disciples who have come, and your Thousand Caves Door also has many members. If we discuss doctrines in each cave one by one, who knows how long it will take. Wouldn't it be better to gather everyone together and then discuss the doctrines all at once?"

"Discuss the doctrines all at once?" Elder Huan Kong looked deeply at Cao Zhen, a cold sneer in his heart. Hadn't he seen Chang Tiance looking several times at Cao Zhen during the discourse? Did he really think it had gone unnoticed?

Clearly, the two must have communicated secretly just before, with Cao Zhen asking Chang Tiance if he was confident, and Chang Tiance presuming that he could overshadow Thousand Caves Door.

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Therefore, when Cao Zhen proposed they engage in a Dao debate it was his intention to do so in front of everyone, to best the Thousand Caves Door.

Seeing that Elder Huan Kong gave no response, Cao Zhen thought for a moment before continuing, "Elder Huan Kong, I don't mean to disrupt your rules. It's just that we... we have urgent matters and need to hurry on our way." Initially, he wanted to say that they were eager to go to the Capital City, but after some thought, he felt it unwise to state that overtly.

Others would think, what do they mean by that? The envoys going to the Capital City can defeat them in a contest of spells—blatantly saying this would be a slap in their face, wouldn't it?

So, he could only hint at it.

Upon hearing this, Elder Huan Kong sneered internally even more. Were they trying to provoke him? Ridiculous. Did they truly believe they were destined to win?

Did they really think that winning against the Mad Grass Cave would mean they could surpass them, the Thousand Caves Door, in the Dao of Calligraphy?

Chang Tiance's calligraphy was indeed not bad, but in previous years, it would not necessarily have been enough to outshine the most outstanding disciples of the Thousand Caves Door.

Not to mention, this year, the Thousand Caves Door has a disciple acclaimed to have the greatest calligraphy talent in a millennium, Shen Xing Hai from the Dark Ink Cave!

To think they want to best us in front of all the members of the Thousand Caves Door.

Fine, since they wish to embarrass themselves, let us indulge them.

Elder Huan Kong sneered inwardly, but his face revealed an amiable smile as he said understandingly, "Since Peak Master Cao has this intention, it wouldn't be right for us, the Thousand Caves Door, to refuse.

Snow Peak, go and spread the word. Please have all thirty-six disciples specializing in the art of calligraphy and painting from the Thousand Caves Door take their places here.

Of course, if any of the Cave Masters have time, they too can come and witness the talent of the disciples of the Hundred Peaks Sect. Other disciples, if not occupied, are also welcome to watch our Dao debate with our friends from the Hundred Peaks Sect."

Lin Xuefeng immediately understood the implicit meaning in Elder Huan Kong's words and hurriedly nodded, "Your disciple will go and make the announcement right away."

No sooner had his voice fallen than his figure had vanished.

Originally, the majority of those surrounding the Dao discussion platform were disciples of the Hundred Peaks Sect, but as Lin Xuefeng departed, one after another, disciples from the Thousand Caves Door began to gather.

In the distance, Cave Masters and disciples from the thirty-six caves of calligraphy of the Thousand Caves Door were approaching.

Elder Huan Kong watched as the crowd arrived, his gaze quickly settling on a disciple—a handsome young man imbued with an air of profound confidence, someone who stood out even in a crowd, catching everyone's eye at a glance.

With a wave of his hand and a chuckle, he said, "Xing Hai, this disciple from the Hundred Peaks Sect wishes to engage in a Dao debate with our Thousand Caves Door. Why don't you have a friendly match with him?"

Originally, he had planned for his Thousand Caves disciples to debate the opponent one by one, as a form of practice. But since the other party had challenged all of them to debate, there was no need to hold back—he could send their strongest immediately.

Previously, it didn't matter much if a disciple from one cave lost a match to someone from the Hundred Peaks Sect,

But now, with so many disciples from the Thousand Caves Door watching, they certainly could not afford to lose again.

"Disciple obeys," replied Shen Xing Hai.

He lightly leapt from among the crowd, landing confidently on the Dao discussion platform. Glancing at the calligraphy written by Chang Tiance, he nodded slightly and said, "Elder Brother Chang excels in cursive script, doesn't he? I too have a modest mastery of cursive. I invite Elder Brother Chang to offer some comments."

As he spoke, he walked promptly to the desk in front of him and immediately began to write.

No need to compose his thoughts or steady his breath.

He didn't even pause to collect himself upon arrival; he immediately began to write.

Confidence, sheer confidence.

He was confident that even a casual script of his would surpass that of Chang Tiance.

His writing speed was rapid, and in no time, the Xuan paper bore characters bursting with wildness and exuberance.

Cursive script, and moreover, it was 'mad grass'!

These characters were even more unrestrained and free-spirited than those of Chang Tiance, more unrestrained and carefree.

Moments later, two rows of cursive script had filled half of the Xuan paper.

But he did not stop there. He paused slightly with his brush, his body leaning forward slightly before resuming his writing.

This time, however, each character he fashioned was meticulous and neat.

"Two styles of writing!" exclaimed an observer.

"Brother Xing Hai is showing two different styles at once!" crowed another.

Below, the disciples from the Thousand Caves Door, upon seeing Shen Xing Hai's work, burst into cheers, their voices imbued with pride.

"Brother Shen excels not in 'mad grass' but in regular script!"

"Even Brother Shen's 'mad grass' is stronger than Chang Tiance's; let alone regular script, in which Brother Shen is even more formidable!"

"Brother Shen is outright telling the opponent that he can defeat you with his best style, and he can even beat you with your best style."

"Absolutely no contest—the disciple from Hundred Peaks Sect is bound to lose."

"As far as the Calligraphy Dao goes, that is all the Hundred Peaks Sect has to show."

Chang Tiance looked at the text before him, a shade of regret crossing his face. He had lost, and in front of Peak Master Cao, no less—lost to someone else. The opponent's 'mad grass' was indeed slightly better than his own, but it wasn't overwhelmingly so, at most half a notch above.

If only he had studied calligraphy more diligently during this period, he might have had a chance to match the opponent in 'mad grass.' Even if he still lost, at least it wouldn't have been such an embarrassing defeat.

Now, having been defeated in his own best style...

Elder Huan Kong listened to the voices of his disciples around him and wore a smile on his face. This was the most outstanding disciple in the Calligraphy Dao that the Thousand Caves Door had seen in a millennium.

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Hundred Peaks Sect chose to challenge them on the Calligraphy Dao, only to hit an iron wall.

He smiled as he looked towards the side of the Hundred Peaks Sect, saying with a laugh, "How about it? I wonder if there is anyone else here who would like to discuss the Dao of Calligraphy?"

Despite this, the voices of the disciples from Thousand Caves Door continued to spread around.

"Town Immortal's Mixed Clan claims to be superior, Hundred Peaks and Thousand Caves vie for distinction. It looks like this saying needs some revising."

"How so?"

"Obviously, it should be 'Town Immortal's Mixed Clan claims to be superior, Thousand Caves stands much higher than Hundred Peaks."

Chang Tiance, his face reddening, listened to the relentless voices around him and the taunting laughter of the disciples from Thousand Caves Door; he exclaimed loudly, "I admit, my writing truly can't compare to this senior brother's, but in my eyes, his writing is just average.

My Chang Tiance's writing certainly cannot represent the Dao of Calligraphy of Hundred Peaks Sect.

Speaking of the Dao of Calligraphy, I'm afraid you may not have heard a certain saying, 'If Heaven had not created Cao Zhen, the Dao of painting and calligraphy would be eternally like a long night."

As he spoke, he turned his head to look at Cao Zhen, his eyes filled with both admiration and shame. As a disciple of Hundred Peaks Sect, he felt ashamed for losing face for Hundred Peaks Sect; in the end, it still depended on Peak Master Cao to turn the tide.

As for that saying, he had altered it himself. Ever since he had witnessed Peak Master Cao's Painting Way, he changed one word in that saying.

"If Heaven had not created Cao Zhen, the Dao of painting and calligraphy would be eternally like a long night? Such audacious words!"

"Even our Cave Master wouldn't dare to make such a claim."

"Who is Cao Zhen? They're looking at their Peak Master—could it be?"

"That one is the Peak Master of Four Treasures Peak from Hundred Peaks Sect. They say his name seems to be Cao Zhen."

"Four Treasures Peak, isn't that the last ranked peak of Hundred Peaks Sect? Their Peak Master dares to speak such words?"

"Even the Sect Master of Pen and Ink Sect has not said such boastful words. A Peak Master from the bottom-ranked peak of Hundred Peaks Sect, what does he have to be so proud of?"

"Frogs in the well! Probably so arrogant due to limited exposure."

The members of Hundred Peaks Sect, upon hearing the ridicule from the disciples of Thousand Caves Door, immediately became agitated and started to shout loudly, "Who are the frogs in the well?"

"Have you ever seen Peak Master Cao's writing?"

"Not convinced? If not, come and compare!"

Huan Kong waved his hands repeatedly and spoke to the people behind him, "Alright, alright. Our Thousand Caves Door and Hundred Peaks Sect are among the ten great Immortal Sects. It is acceptable to discuss and compete in Dao, but let's not lose our manners."

He looked at Shen Xing Hai with a kindly face, smiling, "Since Peak Master Cao wishes to give you some pointers, Xing Hai, aren't you going to thank Peak Master Cao?"

Cao Zhen, after all, is a Peak Master.

Whether he is the Peak Master of the Hundredth Peak or not, he is still a Peak Master!

And Shen Xing Hai is just a disciple of Thousand Caves Door.

To discuss Dao with Shen Xing Hai, Cao Zhen is already lowering his status, which will not sound good if it gets out. Even if Shen Xing Hai loses, nobody will say much about it.

Even outsiders would laugh and say that no one was left in Hundred Peaks Sect; after a disciple lost, they could only have a Peak Master step in to discuss Dao with a disciple of Thousand Caves Door.

But what if they win?

Then it would be Hundred Peaks Sect that would be utterly humiliated. No one would care if it was a Peak Master of Hundredth Peak; everyone would only say that a Peak Master from Hundred Peaks Sect discussed Dao with their disciple of Thousand Caves Door and lost.

Moreover, in his opinion, the chances of Cao Zhen losing were very high.

Although, the people from Hundred Peaks Sect had all urged Cao Zhen to step up and speak up for him, it was clear that Cao Zhen knew calligraphy, perhaps even better than Chang Tiance.

But even if he were stronger, he probably wouldn't be by much.

Cao Zhen—if he were truly extremely skilled in the Calligraphy Dao, why would he still be the Peak Master of Four Treasures Peak instead of moving to Immortal Pen Peak or Wonderful Pen Peak?

Shen Xing Hai would most likely win!

With such a great opportunity at hand, how could they afford to miss it?

The disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect were actually putting their Peak Master on the hot seat; he couldn't miss this chance and had to make the people of Hundred Peaks Sect agree to it.

Cao Zhen listened to the discussions of the people around him and slightly nodded his head, saying, "In that case, let's do it."

Being a member of Hundred Peaks Sect, he naturally had to uphold the reputation of Hundred Peaks Sect. Since the others had failed, it was his turn to step up now.

He quickly walked over to a writing desk, picked up a brush, and was about to write.

But before he could begin, he received a secret message from Lan Pili, "Elder Cao, could you hold back a bit later? We're only comparing with a disciple here—it won't reflect well on us even if we win. Since you've stepped forward, you must crush Thousand Caves Door, and make those Cave Masters of theirs take action.

If you give it your all, the Cave Masters of Thousand Caves Door who witness your strength may not step up themselves. That would give them something to talk about later."

Cao Zhen immediately understood, "You mean let me pull my punches and just barely win against that disciple, right? Don't worry, no problem."

If it were before, he wouldn't have bothered with such trouble and would have directly crushed the competition with his calligraphy.

But on this journey, through many experiences and seeing the disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect willingly sacrificing themselves, witnessing the three from Dharma Apex Sect willing to suppress their cultivation and face death for their sect's reputation and pride, and after seeing the responsibility taken by Elder Shadowless,

his understanding of the sect had completely changed.

As a disciple of Hundred Peaks Sect, he must carry forth the honor of Hundred Peaks Sect!

With his mind made up, Cao Zhen raised his brush and promptly wrote two large characters on the paper in front of him.

Two characters—one a bold and freeform cursive script, and the other a meticulously detailed regular script which, it seems, was not known as 'regular script' in this world but rather referred to as 'standard script.'

Chapter 376: A Discussion of Dao Resulting from a Mix-up\_5

As the two characters were laid down,

Elder Huan Kong immediately turned to gaze at several Cave Masters knowledgeable in the Dao of Calligraphy. He understood calligraphy, but in his eyes, the two characters before him seemed almost equal to those of Shen Xing Hai. However, he faintly felt that the characters at hand were slightly superior.

Since he couldn't be certain, he could only look to the other Cave Masters who were more skilled in the art of calligraphy.

After exchanging glances, the Cave Master of Dark Ink Cave softly exclaimed, "Peak Master Cao is indeed somewhat unexpected. This writing is actually slightly better than my disciple Xing Hai's work."

Elder Huan Kong's expression darkened slightly. Had Cao Zhen really won? Could he actually outdo Shen Xing Hai! Such talent he had, why didn't he study the Calligraphy Dao instead of going to Four Treasures Peak.

What a pity, truly a pity.

If only Shen Xing Hai could have surpassed Cao Zhen, then when it came to debating with the Hundred Peaks Sect over the status of the top Immortal Sect among the Mixed Clan next time, they could have directly cited this incident.

Unfortunately, Cao Zhen was still slightly better.

Behind them, several disciples of the Thousand Caves Door saw their senior brother lose to the opponent and immediately began to shout in dissatisfaction.

"A Peak Master wins against our disciple, that's nothing to be proud of."

"Indeed, our discourse is supposed to be among disciples; what does it mean for a Peak Master to step in?"

"Our Cave Masters haven't even made a move."

"If the Cave Masters entered the fray, their Hundred Peaks Sect would stand no chance of winning."

Lan Pili listened to the shouts of the Thousand Caves Door disciples with great joy in his heart. He had been worrying about how to speak up, and their remarks were like a pillow to a sleepy man.

Feigning seriousness, he said to Elder Huan Kong, "Elder, it seems the disciples of your sect are quite discontent. In that case, why not let the Cave Masters also discuss matters with Peak Master Cao?"

"Oh?" Huan Kong glanced at Lan Pili with some surprise and nodded, "In that case, which of the Cave Masters would like to discuss the Dao with Peak Master Cao?"

They dared to challenge the Cave Masters again, so...

Had Cao Zhen not used his full strength just now?

Otherwise, he couldn't possibly be unaware that narrowly outperforming Shen Xing Hai, a mere disciple, would mean certain defeat against the Cave Masters of the Thousand Caves Door.

It must be so.

But how much of his true strength could he be hiding?

Huan Kong did not believe that a Peak Master from the Hundredth Peak could surpass the Cave Masters of his Thousand Caves Door!

Seeing the other party looking to argue one by one, Cao Zhen felt a headache coming and quickly said, "Why don't we do this? Since the Cave Masters each specialize in different forms of calligraphy, why not write in your respective styles so we all may discuss it together?"

He had to rush to Capital City and did not have time to discuss matters slowly here.

Audacious, too audacious!

Around him, not just the disciples from the Thousand Caves Door but also its Cave Masters, their faces turned sour.

What did this mean?

One person against all of them? And asking each of them to write a different style of calligraphy.

Yet Huan Kong's mind raced, and he quickly said, "Good, since Peak Master Cao has made a request, then let us have a discussion!"

Speaking, he even passed a secret message to the twelve Cave Masters skilled in the Dao of Calligraphy, "Esteemed Cave Masters, please write with all your might.

Later, when we encounter people from the Hundred Peaks Sect, we can talk to them about how each of our twelve Cave Masters has overpowered the Peak Master of the Hundred Peaks Sect. Let's see if they still have the face to contest us for the title of the foremost Immortal Sect among the Mixed Clan."

"Sure."

"That Peak Master from the Hundred Peaks Sect is too arrogant; he needs a good lesson."

"If that's the case, then let us write with all our strength."

"If it were someone from another sect, we might have given them some face, but for the Hundred Peaks Sect, forget it."

"It has been a while since we compared our skills. This time we can see whose Calligraphy Dao has progressed more."

In the Thousand Caves Door, thirty-six Caves specialized in calligraphy knowledge, but among them, some were skilled in the Painting Way, some in both calligraphy and painting, and only twelve purely in the Calligraphy Dao.

The twelve Cave Masters each approached a prepared desk, collected their thoughts to calm their spirits, and after reaching their optimal state, they started to write.

Cao Zhen concentrated for a brief moment before he picked up his brush. Not knowing the level of the others and judging by the skill of their disciple Shen Xing Hai in the Calligraphy Dao, these people were likely superior to the likes of Song Xianbi. He could not afford to be too relaxed.

Ninety percent.

After pondering, Cao Zhen decided to use just over ninety percent of his skill as he began to write.

Instantly, characters began to appear on the paper.

He and the several Cave Masters were writing text that wasn't overly abundant, with the other twelve Cave Masters finishing almost concurrently with him.

A Cave Master set down his brush and, shaking his head slightly, said to the other eleven Cave Masters, "Too hasty. I wasn't well-prepared this time and failed to perform at my best. I'm afraid I'll embarrass myself."

"Not at all, Li Cave Master's calligraphy is, as always, full of vigor. As for me, this brush isn't the one I typically use, and it feels awkward. This time I've really fallen short of my standard."

"You flatter me; it's my writing that will make all of you laugh."

Listening to the conversations of the twelve Cave Masters, Cao Zhen couldn't help but feel it sounded similar to what some of his top-ranking classmates used to say after exams in his previous life.

They would each claim, "I didn't perform well this time."

Chapter 377: A Discussion of Dao Resulting from a Mix-up\_6

"The question was too difficult."

"I hadn't revised that particular knowledge point."

"I made a mistake during the exam."

When the results came and they got their papers back, they realized that their so-called underperformance meant not getting a perfect score and the mistake was getting one question wrong.

That was the sort of feeling the twelve Peak Masters had.

Cao Zhen was puzzled. Are you guys finding it interesting to compete with yourselves? There's still one person here, don't you know to look at what I wrote?

Eventually, the twelve Cave Masters seemed to realize that ignoring someone completely wasn't very nice, and one Cave Master said with a smile, "Why don't we take a look at Peak Master Cao's masterpiece?"

"Having a look couldn't hurt."

"I'm curious to see which style of calligraphy Peak Master Cao excels in."

As they spoke, they had already approached Cao Zhen, bowed their heads, and began to look at the Xuan paper laid out on the table in front of him.

The next moment, the twelve men inhaled sharply, their eyes filled with disbelief as they followed the writing in front of them.

"Without Cao Zhen, the path of painting and calligraphy would be as eternal night."

The first character, "Heaven," was written with powerful strokes. Upon seeing this character, they even felt the illusion of looking up at the sky.

The next character was wild and unrestrained—this was Mad grass!

The third character...

Fourteen characters, each written in a completely different style!

What's more shocking is that every character, each style, was intricately sublime to the extreme. These words, they were simply...

The twelve men, looking at the fourteen characters in front of them, felt a surge of energy within their bodies, and faintly sensed an urge towards enlightenment.

Around them, the crowd watched the immobile twelve Cave Masters, and for a moment, were bewildered. What's wrong with the Cave Masters? Why aren't they moving?

Could they be on the verge of enlightenment?

That's impossible. They are all Cave Masters. How profound would Cao Zhen's writing have to be to enlighten the Cave Masters?

Moreover, twelve Cave Masters at that!

Yet, the Cave Masters continued to stare motionlessly at the writing. What did this mean?

Suddenly, a dense aura of ink surged towards the sky.

Dark Ink Cave Master!

Everyone turned their gaze to Shen Xing Hai's master, Cave Master Peng Moba of Dark Ink Cave, ranked as high as sixty-first.

Peng Moba was surrounded by characters formed of black qi, spiraling around him and flying off into the distance, unbroken for thousands of miles...

"Enlightenment!"

"It's true enlightenment! Cave Master Peng has achieved enlightenment!"

"This... after seeing that calligraphy by Cao Zhen, Cave Master Peng achieved enlightenment. Does that mean..."

"How is that possible!"

"A piece of writing, if it can lead to enlightenment, must exceed the viewer's own level by far! How could Cao Zhen surpass Cave Master Peng so greatly?"

"Cave Master Peng's Dark Ink Cave is the highest-ranked among the twelve that specialize in calligraphy, and he is also the one with the highest cultivation base and the deepest attainment in calligraphy. Is he not as good as the other?"

Surrounding disciples from Thousand Caves Door simply couldn't believe what they were seeing.

"It must be that Cave Master Peng, upon seeing the other's writing, had a moment of realization. It doesn't necessarily mean that Cao Zhen's writing is better than Cave Master Peng's."

"Right, it must be that Cave Master Peng's attainment is so high, he just found something he could learn from, and that led to his enlightenment."

"It has to be."

In the midst of the disciples of Thousand Caves Door's discussions, Cave Master Peng finally emerged from his enlightenment. He turned his head and bowed to Cao Zhen, saying, "Thank you, Peak Master Cao, for your guidance. The grace of sudden enlightenment is beyond repayment."

Cao Zhen was at a loss for words. It wasn't that they were each saying they had nothing to repay? Did the meaning of having nothing to repay actually mean they wouldn't repay?

Couldn't you bring me some medicinal herbs? Couldn't you give me some treasures?

As Cave Master Peng spoke, he let out a long sigh, "Without Cao Zhen, the way of painting and calligraphy would be as eternal night through the ages. Today, Peng finally understands the meaning of this saying. I fear that only this sentence is worthy of Peak Master Cao's astonishing and superb talent."

All around, the people who heard this were greatly taken aback.

"What does this mean?"

"Does Cave Master Peng feel that he is inferior to the other party?"

"Cave Master Peng was defeated?"

"This..."

"What about the other Cave Masters?"

"Right, didn't Cao Zhen challenge several Cave Masters at once? The twelve Cave Masters each excel in different styles of calligraphy. Perhaps, he only surpassed Cave Master Peng in the style he excels in, but not necessarily the others."

"Yes, different styles of calligraphy..."

While everyone was still discussing, the other eleven Cave Masters expressed one after another, "Peak Master Cao has great talent, we are thoroughly convinced."

"Peak Master Cao has won."

"Who would have thought that there's such a person of amazing and superb talent as Peak Master Cao in the world."

The eleven Cave Masters looked at Cao Zhen, and beyond their amazement, there was deep remorse, profound remorse!

They had just begun to vaguely sense a flash of enlightenment, yet Cao Zhen's fourteen characters represented fourteen different fonts, and each of them excelled in only one font.

If only they excelled in more than one font, had more to study, they believed they definitely would have achieved enlightenment.

But regrettably, for each font, there was just one character, and they fell just a little short of enlightenment.

Enlightenment is but an instant of realization.

Now, having failed to achieve enlightenment at the first glimpse of these characters, no matter how much they studied them after returning, they feared they would be unable to attain enlightenment.

Moreover, not being able to become enlightened could not be blamed on anyone else but themselves.

Yet, faced with the same single character, Cave Master Peng had achieved enlightenment.

Shen Xing Hai, listening to his master's thanks and the other eleven Cave Masters' praise, was greatly puzzled. What kind of writing could subdue these twelve Cave Masters?

At this moment, he couldn't care less about his identity as a disciple. Driven by curiosity, his figure flashed, and he appeared directly in front of the desk, looking down at the rice paper filled with black characters. Upon seeing this, his entire being felt as if heaven and earth were spinning.

This...

How is this possible? Can this be the work of a human?

Fourteen characters, fourteen different fonts, each font so exquisitely mastered, each at such a profound level...

How did Peak Master Cao accomplish this!

He himself was reputed to be the disciple with the highest natural talent for the Calligraphy Dao in Thousand Caves Door over a thousand years.

The last person to be given such an evaluation was his own master, yet his master had also once lamented that his (Shen Xing Hai's) talent actually surpassed his own.

His master had even said that his achievements would definitely surpass his, and had declared that among his contemporaries, there were hardly any disciples who could exceed him in the Calligraphy Dao.

Yet today, he had encountered such a person.

This Peak Master Cao, though a Peak Master, was about the same age as himself!

How could he have become so skilled in so many styles of calligraphy at such a young age!

He wasn't even the master of Calligraphy Mountain, but of some Four Treasures Peak, ranked the Hundred Peaks' hundredth Peak Master!

Chapter 378: You Finish Your Performance and Then He Takes the Stage\_1

Thousand Caves Door, the disciples of the various calligraphy and painting caves, finally understood today what it meant to be truly shaken to the core.

They were practitioners of the Painting Way and Calligraphy Dao, and even if they specialized in painting, they were well-versed and proficient in calligraphy as well. What was this before their eyes?

"Fourteen characters, each one in a different style!"

"The key thing is that these are fourteen characters, and every single one creates a sense that it is the pinnacle of perfection, a stroke of brilliance at the utmost boundary!"

"Is this person really the Peak Master of Hundred Peaks Sect, and not a grandmaster calligrapher from Pen and Ink Sect?"

"Four Treasures Peak? I simply cannot believe that such a grandmaster calligrapher is the Peak Master of the Hundred Peaks Sect's Hundredth Peak."

Elder Huan Kong's expression changed continuously as he looked at the fourteen large characters, at times red, at others green. This time, the debate was lost by their Thousand Caves Door.

Although their disciple, Shen Xing Hai, had beaten the opponent's disciple, Cao Zhen alone had defeated all twelve of their Cave Masters.

Cave Master Peng even had an enlightenment due to the opponent's characters, what more was there to say?

Perhaps, if it were some other sects, they would shamelessly claim that a disciple winning one match and then the Cave Masters losing one equaled a draw.

But who were they?

They were Thousand Caves Door!

They were one of the ten great Immortal Sects, they certainly would not act so shamelessly.

Having lost, they admitted defeat. If they were beaten in calligraphy, they would simply seek to regain their honor through another form of debate.

Elder Huan Kong looked towards the other Cave Masters in attendance who were skilled in the Painting Dao.

The disciple from Hundred Peaks Sect had just said that Cao Zhen was also skilled in painting.

Generally speaking, those proficient in the Calligraphy Path would have some understanding of painting.

However, under normal circumstances, those who specialize in the Dao of Calligraphy wouldn't progress very far in painting.

Similarly, those who excel in painting wouldn't go very far in the Dao of Calligraphy.

After all, a person's energy is limited.

Like in their Thousand Caves Door, the masters of the twelve calligraphy caves, while all having some knowledge of painting, could not be considered masters in it.

Those masters who walked both the calligraphy and painting paths, whether they demonstrated their skills in Calligraphy Dao or the Painting Way, could not compare to those who dedicated themselves to just one of those paths.

Of course, there are a rare few prodigies in this world who have achieved mastery in both calligraphy and painting, but such prodigies are exceedingly rare.

As for Cao Zhen...

If Cao Zhen had only taken one or two types of calligraphy to great lengths, Elder Huan Kong would indeed fear that Cao Zhen was one of those heaven-defying prodigies.

Yet Cao Zhen had taken fourteen different styles of calligraphy to such heights, suggesting that Cao Zhen must have devoted all of his efforts.

Crucially, Cao Zhen was not someone who had lived for thousands, tens of thousands of years.

Such a young Cao Zhen could not possibly have the energy to also study painting. Cao Zhen's painting skills absolutely could not be as profound as his calligraphy.

No matter how profound Cao Zhen's Calligraphy Dao was, he only defeated them in calligraphy. As long as they defeated Cao Zhen in painting, they would consider it a match reclaimed.

The Cave Masters of the painting caves felt Elder Huan Kong's gaze and understood his intentions. One Cave Master, who gave off an especially immaculate aura, stepped forward with a smile, "We have witnessed Peak Master Cao's extraordinary Calligraphy Path, truly worthy of being described as 'eternal as the long night.' However, we have yet to see Peak Master Cao's painting skills. The disciple of your esteemed sect mentioned the 'eternal as the long night' principle in both calligraphy and painting."

Although this debate was initially intended for the disciples to engage more, they had already lost once before. In order to regain face, they would have to make Cao Zhen lose again, so they had no choice but to enter the fray themselves.

After all, Cao Zhen was a Peak Master, and if they continued to let their disciples argue with him, Cao Zhen might not take action again, leaving it to the Cave Masters themselves to step up.

Lan Pili, upon hearing this, was overjoyed. These folks from Thousand Caves Door, not content with losing one match, were now delivering themselves for another defeat. With the opportunity to strike at Thousand Caves Door, he naturally could not let it pass.

"Peak Master Cao, since these masters wish to debate painting with you, you shouldn't hold back," said Lan Pili.

The disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect around him all wore smiling faces, and even Chang Tiance had already stepped up to the writing table, smoothing out the surface.

Some of them had not seen Peak Master Cao paint, but they had heard about that time when Qing Mozi, the disciple from Pen and Ink Sect known for excellence in both calligraphy and painting, nearly bested every single one of Hundred Peaks Sect's masters specialized in those arts.

It was Peak Master Cao who personally intervened, causing the latter to concede in admiration.

Even Qing Mozi had an enlightenment twice in one day because of a single painting by Peak Master Cao.

Qing Mozi hailed from the Pen and Ink Sect, a sect dedicated to the paths of both calligraphy and painting.

Within the entire Guardian Immortal Imperial Dynasty, the only one that could compare to Pen and Ink Sect in the arts of calligraphy and painting was the Four Extremes Sect.

As for the other sects, perhaps some of the elders or Cave Masters who specialized in calligraphy and painting were of a higher Cultivation Base than Qing Mozi, but in terms of skill in the arts, they were most likely inferior to him.

If Peak Master Cao could defeat Qing Mozi, defeating these people from Thousand Caves Door would be a minor task.

Elder Huan Kong stared at the Hundred Peaks Sect's disciples, who were beaming across from him. A trace of worry flickered in his heart; the situation seemed different from what he had envisioned.

Why did it seem like the disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect were so confident?

That Cao Zhen couldn't possibly have reached the same level in the Painting Way as he had in his Calligraphy Dao, could he?

Impossible, it surely couldn't be, he must be overthinking it... Definitely overthinking it...

Chapter 379: You Finish Your Performance and Then He Takes the Stage\_2

Huan Kong kept reassuring himself, yet Cao Zhen had already picked up his brush to start painting.

This time, the Cave Masters skilled in the Painting Way, unlike those who specialized in Calligraphy Knowledge, did not join Cao Zhen in painting, but instead, they turned their gazes towards Cao Zhen's scroll.

"This is... what he is painting is, the Dao discussion platform."

"Such a strong skill in painting..."

"This..."

Some of them wanted to make further comments, but gradually, the more they observed, the more astonished they became, and before they knew it, they were completely immersed in the painting.

The painting depicted the scene of the Dao discussion platform, even capturing all the people around it with every person's expression and demeanor uniquely different.

Despite the multitude of figures in the painting, it conveyed no sense of disarray or exaggeration, but rather, there was a feeling of pristine clarity.

The painting was graceful and vibrant, flowing with ease, filled with an atmosphere of serenity...

All the Cave Masters from the painting sects stared blankly at the scroll, none speaking a word, nor making any other movement.

After a while, Cao Zhen finished his painting, signed his name, and put the final touches.

As the last character of his name was placed,

Not far away, among the observing Cave Masters, mana surged wildly from two of them as if countless colors of light beams were shooting from their bodies. Their mana spread outwards like the unfolding of a scroll, permeating the surroundings.

"Enlightenment!"

"Another enlightenment, and it's two Cave Masters at the same time!"

"This..."

All the disciples from Thousand Caves Door were utterly dumbstruck. These were Cave Masters who had gained enlightenment from a painting by a Peak Master from Hundred Peaks Sect!

This...

What was this situation?

How could their Cave Masters gain enlightenment from someone else's characters and paintings?

To those from Hundred Peaks Sect, seeing the two Cave Masters gaining enlightenment seemed like a normal phenomenon. Hadn't Qing Mozi from Pen and Ink Sect achieved enlightenment twice in one day before?

Moments later, the two Cave Masters regained their composure.

The two of them looked at each other and bowed in unison towards Cao Zhe, "Thank you, Peak Master Cao, for your enlightening guidance. This profound favor is impossible to repay."

They had to remember this favor, as enlightenment came through the other.

Cao Zhen was speechless, 'impossible to repay' again? Couldn't they find any other phrase? Could they not offer something more tangible?

Following their speeches, the other Cave Masters around also started praising one after another.

"Peak Master Cao's painting captures the essence of objects, refined and lifelike, making the beings within the painting seem vivid and alive, resulting in awe."

"It harmonizes form and spirit, brimming with thought, exuding an extraordinary allure."

"Peak Master Cao's painting is an integration of calligraphy and art, where painting and inscription ingeniously combine to become part of the image."

"With Peak Master Cao's painting present, we see no need to present our inferior works."

The Cave Masters shook their heads in agreement. With such a painting before them, why should they paint? Among them were two whose enlightenment directly arose from someone else's art.

The rest couldn't even qualify for enlightenment; the difference was too vast. Having Peak Master Cao as their master would be more than sufficient.

They just didn't understand, with Cao Zhen's peak achievements in the ways of painting and calligraphy, why wasn't he following the path of painting or calligraphy? Why had he chosen to be the master of Four Treasures Peak?

What was Hundred Peaks Sect thinking?

And what was he thinking himself?

Huan Kong watched as one Cave Master after another conceded defeat with a sigh, his expression a complicated web. It was good that three Cave Masters had achieved enlightenment.

The problem was that they had gained enlightenment because of Cao Zhen, and it occurred during a Dao discussion, which meant Thousand Caves Door had lost again!

For millennia, there was this saying passed down in Thousand Caves Door, 'Lose to anyone, but never to Hundred Peaks Sect!' Yet now, they had lost to Hundred Peaks Sect twice in succession.

They must win back the honor, and not just the disciples, they must defeat Cao Zhen as well.

Otherwise, once the people from Hundred Peaks Sect left, they would proclaim that their Peak Master had prevailed over all in Thousand Caves Door, with no one able to stop him.

What did Cao Zhen claim to be skilled in again...?

Huan Kong quickly pondered, recalling Cao Zhen's previous words... Ah yes, Musical Rhythm; Cao Zhen had mentioned he was skilled in Musical Rhythm.

That was from Cao Zhen himself, so there should be no issue if he challenged him directly in Musical Rhythm. He refused to believe that Cao Zhen, a young man who hadn't lived long and was the Peak Master of the lowest-ranked peak in Hundred Peaks Sect, could achieve the same high level of proficiency in Musical Rhythm as he had in painting and calligraphy.

While painting and calligraphy shared some commonalities, Musical Rhythm and painting were completely different.

Even if Cao Zhen was truly skilled in painting and calligraphy, it was impossible for him to defeat them in Thousand Caves Door when it comes to Musical Rhythm.

In their sect, there was that one person.

In fact, without needing that one person to make a move, certain Cave Masters could defeat Cao Zhen.

With this thought, Huan Kong looked at Cao Zhen and spoke, "By the way, during our previous conversation, Peak Master Cao mentioned being skilled in Musical Rhythm. So next, shall we debate on Musical Rhythm? How about we go to Immortal Melody Hall? Well, that place houses all our Thousand Caves Door's musical instruments. Usually, our disciples adept in the Musical Rhythm realm also debate there.

Of course, the one debating with Peak Master Cao will not be the disciples, but our Cave Masters."

He couldn't ask Cao Zhen if he was willing to debate on Musical Rhythm; that would give Cao Zhen a chance to refuse. By inviting him directly to Immortal Melody Hall, Cao Zhen would find it hard to decline. If he refused, it would appear as though he was afraid.

Chapter 380: You Finish Your Performance and Then He Takes the Stage\_3

Among the disciples of Hundred Peaks Sect, the one from Zither Music Peak looked at Elder Huan Kong with a dumbfounded face and said, "Isn't our debate supposed to be led by disciples? Why did you bypass me entirely and go directly to Peak Master Cao after you asked us what we were all skilled at, and I already told you that I am a disciple from Zither Music Peak, skilled in musical rhythm?"

Lan Pili's expression changed instantly upon hearing that Huan Kong was looking for someone to discuss musical rhythm with Cao Zhen. He knew that Peak Master Cao was skilled in calligraphy and painting, so he was happy to let those from Thousand Caves Door debate with Peak Master Cao on that subject, but musical rhythm?

Was Peak Master Cao also skilled in musical rhythm?

He had never heard of Peak Master Cao being skilled in musical rhythm.

As far as he knew, those skilled in musical rhythm needed to practice every day and would feel uneasy if they didn't play an instrument for even a single day, yet he hadn't seen Peak Master Cao sing or play music these past days.

Neither did Peak Master Cao, who unnecessarily boasted about what he was skilled at.

Now that Elder Huan Kong had said so, inviting the cave masters to battle, if Peak Master Cao declined, it would appear as though he was afraid of them. But what if he accepted?

Peak Master Cao had previously won; Hundred Peaks Sect had already gained an advantage over Thousand Caves Door. If they lost again...

As he was racking his brain, Cao Zhen spoke with some anticipation, "Then this time, let's include the cave masters from Rhythmic Cave as well."

If they were to play music one by one, who knows when it would end.

So, it's better to have a group compete together.

"Good, since Peak Master Cao has come from afar and has a request, as hosts, it is only natural for us to accommodate," Elder Huan Kong readily agreed. As long as Cao Zhen was willing to enter the debate, any request could be accepted.

"Snow Peak, go notify the various cave masters to head to Immortal Melody Hall."

Immortal Melody Hall was, in fact, a massive hall.

Inside the hall were all kinds of musical instruments.

When Cao Zhen entered the hall, it didn't take long for several cave masters from Rhythmic Cave, adorned in cave master attire, to arrive with their disciples.

While walking, a few of them began to complain to Elder Huan Kong.

"Elder Huan Kong, which dao companion from Hundred Peaks Sect has come to challenge us at Thousand Caves Door that requires assembling all our cave masters?"

"In the realm of musical rhythm, only the Peak Master of Zither Music Peak from Hundred Peaks Sect is worth noting; she did not come, so is there any need to summon all of us?"

"I heard it's the Peak Master of Four Treasures Peak who wants to debate with us, but as far as I know, Four Treasures Peak doesn't specialize in musical rhythm. Moreover, to have a debate with all our cave masters?"

"Fellow cave masters, Peak Master Cao is our guest, and since he has made a request, it would be improper for us as hosts to refuse. How about we all join Peak Master Cao in the debate? As for how to conduct the debate, that will be up to you to decide," Elder Huan Kong called out to everyone and sent a secret message, "Fellow cave masters, we've already lost to this Cao Zhen in the previous calligraphy and painting debate."

The face of Thousand Caves Door now rests on you all. I ask that you give your best effort in battle. Oh, and why hasn't Master Liao Cave arrived?"

"Elder, you should be aware of Master Liao Cave's character; she wouldn't show up for such matters."

"We don't need Master Liao Cave to defeat that Cao Zhen."

"I think there's no need for all cave masters to take the field."

"Forget it, those from Calligraphy and Painting Cave were too embarrassing. For the honor of Thousand Caves Door, let's all join in. Every one of us should use our full power to surpass him. Only by doing so can we reclaim the face lost by Calligraphy and Painting Cave."

"We can play music together; if Peak Master Cao is the first to fall behind, he will embarrass himself greatly."

"Let's do it this way."

The group swiftly agreed on how to proceed with the debate. A slightly plump cave master dressed in cave master attire stepped forward and smiled, "Master Cao Cave, having so many of us together would not be suitable for any other form of debate. Why not play music together instead? Each of us could perform 'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody' with our respective instruments, and the last one playing will be the victor!"

Playing music was something all of them could do, but when so many people played together, even if it was the same piece, the different styles would create diverse effects.

Those weak in the art of rhythm would naturally be the first to falter, unable to keep up, or make a mistake, signifying defeat.

"'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody'?" A puzzled look crossed Cao Zhen's face; he shook his head and said, "I have not heard of this piece; may I take a look at the sheet music?"

He was connected with Gao Jianli, who knew only the songs Gao Jianli could play. Since 'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody' was a melody from the Guardian Immortal Imperial Dynasty, Gao Jianli naturally wouldn't know it, and if Gao Jianli didn't know it, neither would he.

However, there shouldn't be a big problem.

Gao Jianli's level of musical rhythm was at ninety-nine; even if he hadn't heard of the piece before, with the sheet music, he could understand it after a quick read.

"You haven't heard of 'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody'?" Surprise appeared on the face of the cave master opposite him; the disciples of Thousand Caves Door who followed the cave masters laughed out loud upon hearing this.

"'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody' is one of the most basic pieces. Any cultivator who practices the way of musical rhythm should know it."

"Forget cultivators, even the performing commoners of Guardian Immortal Imperial Dynasty know this piece."

"Not knowing 'Breaking Formation Robe Swamp Melody' means you have no understanding of musical rhythm at all."

"I think we don't even need the cave masters; any one of us could defeat him."