

Nine Star 3971

Chapter 3971: The True Me?

Long Chen waited a long time, but everything was still deathly still. Thankfully, Long Chen was in no rush, so he patiently waited.

Long Chen sat on the ground lotus style as if entering meditation. This endless darkness made him feel particularly peaceful for some reason.

Time passed bit by bit. One day, two days, three days. Long Chen was still sitting there motionlessly, as if he really had entered a meditative state.

Within the palace, Yu Xiaoyun, Jiang Huixin, and Xu Lanxin were staring at a mirror, bewildered. Was the little black room broken?

This little black room was a place that ignored a person's cultivation base and realm. No matter how strong someone was, as long as they had the slightest weakness, it would be magnified endlessly. Negative emotions would attack them, and they could only bitterly endure that torment until the time was up.

This was a place where every day felt as long as a hundred years, every breath was torture, while loneliness, fear, solitude, worry, despair, and other negative emotions were like devils within their bodies, running rampant. No one was able to fight back.

Even the three of them would be in a difficult situation if they entered the little black room. Every time they came out, they would be weary to the bone and would need to recuperate for a few days.

However, this was not a punishment as they entered voluntarily, using it to temper their wills.

For them, one day might be nothing. But by the second day, things would get hard, and the third day was pushing them to their limit.

Once they were at that point, they could only endure another two days. Five days was their longest record. Furthermore, the longest stay in the little black room without dying throughout all of history was only six days.

However, Long Chen was currently sitting relaxingly inside. It had already been three days, but he seemed completely fine, causing the three of them to be dumbfounded.

"There are only ten days, and three days have passed. Are you really refusing to see me?" said Long Chen.

Even so, no one replied to him. As his voice was submerged in the darkness, he didn't even hear it himself.

However, Long Chen still remained patient. He continued to just sit there, patiently waiting.

The fourth day, the fifth day, and the sixth day passed. Yu Xiaoyun and the other two grew increasingly shocked. Just what was going on? Such a thing had never occurred before.

It was on the seventh day that a black figure finally appeared in front of Long Chen. At that moment, Yu Xiaoyun and the others instantly shot up.

Suddenly, a hand shot out of this clump of black qi, causing the mirror to instantly turn dark. They couldn't see anything.

"That is Long Chen's heart-devil."

"It noticed us."

The three of them were shocked. They finally understood what Long Chen was waiting for. He wanted to face his heart-devil.

"What do we do? Should we open the room?" wondered Xu Lanxin.

Jiang Huixin thought about it and said, "No, Long Chen is borrowing the power of the room to draw out his heart-devil. He must have his own plan. A smart child like him won't play around with his own life."

Yu Xiaoyun then made some hand seals. The mirror was flickering, but they only saw darkness.

"It's useless. Long Chen's heart-devil seems to have been waiting for this. It doesn't want us to see it. Furthermore, it is borrowing the power of the little black room to block our vision," advised Jiang Huixin.

Only when Yu Xiaoyun heard that did he give up. However, he still felt uneasy when he looked at that pitch-black mirror.

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Within the darkness, an icy voice rang out. "Human nature is goodness? What nonsense. Humans are naturally evil. Before you even know anything, when you see a beautiful flower, your first instinct is to grab it, plucking it with your hand. When you see a clean wall, your first thought is to draw on top of it and make it dirty. Your true character is darkness. That is why you feel like a fish in water in this dark world full of negative emotions. However, you keep choosing to walk toward the light. You are not just limiting yourself; you are suppressing yourself. Otherwise, if you were just following your innate nature, would living be so tiring?"

That voice belonged to the other Long Chen, Long Chen's heart-devil. Long Chen knew that it would become active here. As expected, he had appeared.

Long Chen clapped. "You really have grown. You actually came out to see me instead of directly suppressing me like before and trying to violently take control. When besieging a city, it's a siege on the people's hearts. For you to use this method is quite unexpected for me."

At this moment, space quivered and a person who looked identical to Long Chen appeared in front of him. As soon as he appeared, surprisingly, a trace of light appeared in this dark world. Long Chen and his heart-devil looked at each other.

The only difference in appearance between Long Chen and his heart-devil was their eyes. Long Chen's eyes were black and white, while the heart-devil's eyes were pitch-black, akin to black holes that would devour the entire universe.

“Siege the heart? I understand you, but you don’t understand me. You drew me out to have a fight with me, wanting to use a victory to dissolve your fear of me. You thought you have learned a few powerful techniques from that dragon expert, and now is your best chance to beat me, right? But I suppose you never realized that this room is the core of a dark world’s star-field. I possess endless power here. If we were to fight, you stood no chance. Furthermore, with your pride, you won’t use the Vermilion Bird Empire’s emperor to help suppress me. You have your own pride, but I also have my own. I disdain using this core’s power to deal with you. When it comes to power, you aren’t a match for me. And when it comes to growth rate, you are a far cry from me. I am in no rush. The more you suppress me, the faster I grow. If you were to release my true self, I would control this body. I can already see the future. In the future, the entire world will be mine.”

“Are you sure that you’re the true me?”

“Of course. I am your innate self, your instinctual self. I am the true you. As for you, you are the result of constantly suppressing your desires, your instincts, and your character. Others might be able to do that, but you cannot. Others can wantonly slaughter, but you can’t. You suppress me to give yourself a halo of light and kindness for others to see. But it’s all fake. On the other hand, I am real. All things have their own character. Since I can exist in this world, I am qualified to rule the world. White and black, right and wrong, what do they have to do with me? What I want is to become the king of this world. Follow me and prosper, defy me and die. I will be the right and wrong of this world!”

“You mean that people should do whatever they want at any moment? That any despicable or shameless thing can be done because you are the one who decides right or wrong? Since that’s the case, you are the true me?” asked Long Chen.

“Correct.”

“Is it because you are capable of using any kind of treacherous move, without caring the slightest bit about your face?”

“Of course.”

“Then there’s nothing for me to feel embarrassed about!”

Long Chen suddenly formed hand seals. The next moment, the void split open, and a bronze cauldron swallowed the other Long Chen.

Chapter 3972: Despicably Shameless

“You want to play schemes?!”

The other Long Chen roared, but it was too late for him to dodge. Long Chen had long since prepared this and didn’t give him any chance to do as he wished.

BOOM!

As the bronze cauldron slammed down, flames and lightning weaved into a barrier around its mouth, trapping the other Long Chen inside the bronze cauldron.

“Long Chen, you are despicable and shameless!” The other Long Chen roared from within the bronze cauldron. He then tried to charge out of the cauldron, but it didn’t budge in the slightest. Even with all his power, he was unable to cause a ripple in the cauldron.

“Hehe, no, no, this isn’t called shamelessness. It is returning to my true self. Isn’t that what you just taught me? A person should live happily and as they please, right? Isn’t that what you said? Why are you so hypocritical?” laughed Long Chen.

BOOM!

Suddenly, the bronze cauldron flipped over. Lei Linger and Huo Linger’s power erupted as they kept the seal on.

“You wish to seal me?! Keep dreaming!”

BOOM!

With a crazed roar, a powerful explosion erupted and the seal composed of Huo Linger and Lei Linger’s power cracked, almost breaking.

It had to be known that Long Chen had been planning this for several days. In order to be sure of success, he had had the two of them accumulate all their power. They didn’t hold back in the slightest. However, the other Long Chen was just too powerful. Even all their powers combined were unable to contain him for long.

BOOM!

Just then, the cauldron’s lid slammed shut, sealing the cauldron for good. Most cauldrons didn’t have a lid, but this bronze cauldron did.

When the lid slammed shut, a furious roar came from within the cauldron. “Long Chen, just you wait! Next time, I won’t waste words with you! I will directly take control of that body! Just you wait!”

“You are so boring. When I am bright and kind, you call me fake. When I am sinister and treacherous, you call me despicably shameless. You say that you are the true me, but I don’t believe it. We are two sides of the same person. Time will prove everything.”

“This cauldron isn’t something that you can control! You cannot seal me forever! It won’t be long before I’m out, and when I do, I will properly settle this debt with you!” roared the other Long Chen.

“Calm yourself. I wasn’t planning on sealing you forever anyway. Even so, you can be a thief for a thousand days in a row, but you can’t be on guard against a thief for a thousand days in a row. If I’m always on guard against you, it would be too tiring. It just so happens that I could use a vacation. I’ll relax, and once I’m in top condition, we can fight once more.” Long Chen smiled brightly.

“Just you wait! You will pay a price for your foolishness!” The other Long Chen roared and then fell silent.

Long Chen examined the bronze cauldron. The lid fit seamlessly without the slightest gap anywhere, but he could still sense dark energy slowly oozing out from between the lid and the cauldron.

Long Chen knew that this was his heart-devil's power. Just as his heart-devil said, although Long Chen had sealed him inside the cauldron, Long Chen could not truly control it, so this could not be a perfect seal.

The heart-devil's power was constantly escaping. Sooner or later, he would escape.

However, that was a matter for the future. At least, in the near future, he wouldn't have to worry about his heart-devil causing trouble. It could be said that this plan had gone off perfectly.

When Huo Linger and Lei Linger returned to the primal chaos space, Long Chen's heart shook. In that brief moment, their cores were badly damaged by the attack of his heart-devil.

That shocked him. It had to be known that he hadn't given his heart-devil any time to accumulate power. In other words, that had been nothing more than an ordinary attack.

However, even such an ordinary attack could damage Lei Linger and Huo Linger's cores. That was something that Long Chen was not capable of.

Fortunately, he had won by outsmarting his heart-devil. If they were to truly fight, even with the dragon race's divine abilities, Long Chen really would have no assurance in beating him.

"Fuck, why does he grow so quickly? He doesn't even have to do anything, but his power keeps climbing! That's so unfair!" cursed Long Chen.

Even so, having resolved the danger of his heart-devil allowed Long Chen to relax temporarily. Within this endless darkness, he felt an indescribable peace as if the darkness was his home. Here, his heart was at peace.

"Not bad. You've temporarily dealt with your heart-devil. Now, you can peacefully focus on researching the Seven Star Battle Armor without worrying about him taking control when you are weakened." The dragon expert's voice rang out in his mind.

"Senior, I've already thought of hundreds of possibilities. Can I try condensing a new Seven Star Battle Armor now?" asked Long Chen, excited to hear the dragon expert's opinion.

Long Chen had been itching to start testing the new Seven Star Battle Armor, but the dragon expert hadn't said anything all this time, so he hadn't dared to mess around.

"Your current power is not enough. My suggestion is that you wait until you reach three thousand dragon power before condensing the Seven Star Battle Armor. That way, the risk will be at its lowest. You know what kind of luck you have. You can't hope to live off of luck, so you must make progress slowly and steadily."

"What is three thousand dragon power?" asked Long Chen.

"It's a power measuring scale of the dragon race, and some ancient inheritances continue to use this standard. There is such a standard in the Vermilion Bird Empire as well. When you have time, you can go test yourself and you'll know," said the dragon expert.

After saying that, the dragon expert fell silent. Long Chen tried asking several questions, but there was no response. It was as if it had cut off their connection.

Long Chen didn't mind this. In any case, he had resolved the greatest crisis right now, so he felt much more relaxed.

He took out a bed, and just like that, started sleeping in the little black room. The days that he had to live with a heart devil were very tough. It was a constant strain on his mind, a constant pressure on his spirit. He had to be constantly wary of his heart-devil influencing him. Thus, it had been a long time since he had properly slept, without the constant fear of being invaded by his heart-devil in his dreams.

With his heart-devil sealed, he could finally sleep in peace. He entered a land of dreams as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Inside the palace, Yu Xiaoyun and the others didn't see the heart-devil. It was only when Long Chen put away the heart-devil that the mirror revealed the situation in the little black room. At that time, Long Chen was already sleeping peacefully.

The three of them stared at each other, not knowing what had just happened. But Long Chen was sleeping peacefully in the little black room now, looking so sweet and peaceful.

Long Chen then slept for three days and nights. In his dreams, he was in the Martial Heaven Continent. He saw his father, his mother, and his little sister. His whole family ate together. After that, Meng Qi, Chu Yao, Tang Wan-er, Ye Zhiqiu, Dong Mingyu, Zi Yan, Liu Ruyan, and the others joined them as well.

Long Chen was so excited that he switched out the table for an even bigger one. Just as they sat down, a gate opened and divine light spilled forth, illuminating two figures. Although he couldn't see their faces, Long Chen still cried out, "Dad, Mom!"

A pair of warm hands caressed his cheeks. Long Chen then wept, holding onto those hands.

"Mom, do you know how much your child misses you? I always see you in my dreams. But when I wake up, you're gone. Can you not leave me this time?"

All of a sudden, Long Chen woke up, only to be greeted by an intense brightness that rendered him unable to pry his eyes open. As his vision gradually cleared, he was disappointed to not see his parents, but Jiang Huixin and Xu Lanxin.

So, the bright light in his dream came from the opening of the little black room, its intense light illuminating his face. Ultimately, dreams were nothing more than illusions, destined to be shattered as one inevitably woke from their slumber.

Chapter 3973: The Imperial Family's Cultivation Grounds

When the gates opened one by one, the bright light illuminated Long Chen's tears. At this moment, he was no longer the dean of the High Firmament Academy or an unrivaled heavenly genius, but just a helpless child.

The thirst in his eyes and that helpless expression stabbed deep into the two women's hearts. When Long Chen realized who it was in front of him, that expression of loss made their hearts ache.

"Sorry for being rude. Junior Long Chen greets aunts." After a moment, Long Chen rose and bowed to the two of them.

“Child, can you tell me who your father and mother are?” asked Jiang Huixin softly.

Long Chen’s expression just now had left a deep impression on her, triggering Jiang Huixin’s maternal instincts. She truly wished to help Long Chen.

Long Chen smiled. “In truth, there’s nothing to say about it. I don’t even know what they look like. But I accept your kind intentions.”

Although he had felt lost upon awakening, he quickly adjusted himself. After his heart-devil was suppressed, he felt relaxed and full of confidence for the future.

He knew that his mother was definitely still alive. Luo Zichuan refused to tell him, but he had to have his reasons.

As for his father, he had heard of him from Long Aotian and knew that he was alive. They would definitely see each other again.

Seeing that Long Chen refused to say, a kind flicker appeared in Jiang Huixin’s eyes. She knew that Long Chen was no ordinary child. He had to be under all kinds of pressure, but he just didn’t speak of them.

“Alright, the ten days are over. Big sister Huixin and I came here because we were worried that you would be on the verge of collapse. But it seems that the worry was for nothing,” said Xu Lanxin.

Long Chen seemed in top condition, so they couldn’t help being curious. Had the little black room really stopped working?

After Long Chen bid them farewell and left, he stretched lazily in the warm sunlight. He felt full of power. He didn’t remember the last time he had ever felt so good.

“Big brother!”

Just then, he saw Zhu Yifeng and Yu Qianxue walking over. Zhu Yifeng cried out excitedly.

“Big brother, are you alright?”

“Why wouldn’t I be? I just slept in the room. I feel great. Let’s go, I’ll treat you to more fish!” Long Chen laughed.

However, Zhu Yifeng shivered when Long Chen mentioned ‘fish’. He was traumatized by the word after the last incident.

Yu Qianxue examined Long Chen. Seeing that he was in amazing condition, even better than when he had entered the little black room, she was unable to understand. Had the higher-ups given him special treatment?

“Let’s go back to the mansion first,” said Yu Qianxue.

Long Chen smiled. “You had me watch the gate to the medicinal field and then you sent me to the fishing grounds to raise fish. Now, what are you going to get me to do? Perhaps you want me to feed some spirit beasts?”

“Keep dreaming. If you keep going like this, I’m going to lose all my money!” roared Yu Qianxue furiously.

Only after roaring furiously did she take note that this wasn’t the place to shout. She hastily ran off with Long Chen and Zhu Yifeng.

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“The little black room is still functioning normally. Every rune is intact, and the core of the star-field is also operating normally. Such a thing should never have occurred. Unless... Long Chen is originally a lifeform from hell.”

Within the palace, Xu Lanxin was still unable to figure out how Long Chen had done this. Jiang Huixin and Yu Xiaoyun were equally puzzled.

“This brat has too many secrets. I don’t like him. I don’t want my daughter to be with someone like this,” said Yu Xiaoyun.

“But I really do like this child.” Jiang Huixin smiled.

“Why?” Yu Xiaoyun couldn’t help but feel angry.

“Because Long Chen is more mature than you, and he knows how to share happiness with others. Have you not noticed that Qingxuan is much happier after he appeared?” asked Jiang Huixin.

“What maturity?! He doesn’t even know the slightest thing about politeness, and his temper is terrible! Qingxuan will definitely suffer if she stays with him!” snorted Yu Xiaoyun.

“I don’t think so. Although Long Chen’s temper is bad, it also depends on who he’s talking to. His temper toward us has been very good, and he’s fully devoted to Yu Qingxuan. He’s not like someone who can’t even tell enemies and allies apart when his temper explodes,” said Xu Lanxin subtly.

“You two...! Have you really been bought with two jugs of wine?!” Yu Xiaoyun was furious. From the start, these two had been helping Long Chen, making him feel very uncomfortable.

Jiang Huixin glared at him. “Sister Lanxin is just joking. This temper of yours is just like when you were young. It hasn’t improved at all. I like that child Long Chen not because Qingxuan spoke up for him, or because of his talent, illustrious background, or even his wine. It is because that child Long Chen is full of love for this world. From his eyes, I can see a heart-aching pain. However, he is still full of light. Even if this world hurts him countless times, he still loves this world. This is something that we weren’t able to achieve in our youth. We were even rebellious and arrogant, despising this world for the pain it gave us. Although we might refuse to admit it, we’ve also gone through the black room’s torture. We might be able to lie to others, but we can’t lie to ourselves. For Long Chen to be able to fall asleep peacefully in the black room is proof that his inner heart is still pure. He is not afraid of his negative emotions.”

“The only reason he could sleep inside is because of his heart-devil! Who knows what he did during that time,” quibbled Yu Xiaoyun.

“No matter what you say, Long Chen is much stronger than we were back then. You can’t judge a person solely with your personal feelings. That would be too biased!” said Jiang Huixin.

"But I just don't like that brat! It's like that brat was an enemy from my past life!" Yu Xiaoyun shook his head.

"Of course, he was your enemy. Why else would he come to take away your treasured daughter?" laughed Xu Lanxin.

"Xiaoyun, there's not that much time left. Let everyone relax and be happy for a bit!" Jiang Huixin suddenly sighed sadly.

When she said this, Yu Xiaoyun and Xu Lanxin fell silent. All three of them had a touch of sorrow on their faces.

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"Long Chen, why are you suddenly interested in the imperial family's cultivation grounds? I thought that you were going to keep evading my challenge. Didn't you want to avoid revealing your power?" Yu Qianxue looked at Long Chen curiously as she brought them to an extravagant outdoor cultivation ground.

This cultivation ground was a place only princes, princesses, and those with special status plates could enter. It was the highest level cultivation ground in the empire.

Even princes and princesses had to pay money to enter this place. However, they then could enjoy the most accurate tests and greatest trials by fire.

"I heard that you have special instruments to test someone's power. I want to try it!"

Long Chen smiled. He was looking to see how far he was from the dragon expert's requirement.

"Oh, isn't this Long Chen, the frog lusting after the swan's flesh?" Just then, an arrogant voice full of provocation rang out.

Chapter 3974: Smashed into a Meat Patty

Following that voice, a group of large, muscular experts in extravagant robes walked in.

"It's the crown prince's people. They're intentionally causing trouble, but it's not convenient for me to teach them a lesson in this place. However, you don't need to have so many misgivings. As long as you are strong enough, you can do whatever you want with them. There's no need to give them face," whispered Yu Qianxue in Long Chen's ear.

Over ten experts approached with confident strides. Their leader was a full head taller than Long Chen, and his arms rivaled the thickness of a person's thighs. But what was even more amazing was his Blood Qi that was surging under his skin like serpents.

When those experts stopped in front of Long Chen, the leader stared at Long Chen provokingly. He was a powerful Double Supreme, and his Blood Qi was like a raging fire, suffocating others.

With a disdainful smile, he said, "Someone like you wants to marry a princess? Maybe you should take a piss and look at your reflection first. You think you're qualified?"

Long Chen smiled and looked from this large man to the others. Shaking his head, he indifferently said, "My mood is good today, and I don't want other people to ruin it. Also, my temper isn't very good, so I would advise you to hurry up and scram. You can just be good people. Is being a dog so interesting? If Zhu Yunwen doesn't accept me, he can come at me directly. What is the point of sending a few scapegoats?"

Long Chen knew that the crown prince nursed a grudge against him after they had almost fought that day. Thus, his subordinates would naturally target him.

One of them pointed at Long Chen and cursed, "Brat, you should watch your language, or else-!"

Before he could finish his sentence, Long Chen swiftly grabbed his wrist, exerting a tremendous force that resulted in the violent tearing of the entire arm. Blood then sprayed in all directions as the individual let out a harrowing scream.

It happened all too quickly for anyone to react. Now, that person's dismembered arm was in Long Chen's grasp.

"Courting death!"

Their leader furiously smashed a fist at Long Chen. However, the confined space limited his ability to gather power, resulting in an attack solely relying on his physical strength. Despite this limitation, this fist unleashed a wild tempest.

To their surprise, his large fist was caught by Long Chen's hand, which was akin to a dragon claw digging into his fist, making him feel pain. Without hesitation, this expert sent a kick at Long Chen's armpit to make him let go.

However, he had just raised his foot when Long Chen directly lifted him up.

After that, in front of everyone's stunned gaze, the large man was ruthlessly slammed into the ground.

BOOM!

As he was solidly smashed into the ground, the bricks' runes lit up, forming a powerful defensive formation that protected the ground from any damage. On the other hand, that large man hacked up blood, his teeth letting out a crunching sound.

"Who said that you could have such a dirty mouth?!" roared Long Chen.

Long Chen raised the large man into the air, using him like a sandbag and smashing him into the ground repeatedly.

Seeing this scene, Yu Qianxue and Zhu Yifeng were dumbfounded. Long Chen's attack had come so abruptly that they were unable to react in time. Moreover, they couldn't even tell what technique he was using, as it was completely different from the fighting style that they were used to.

How could Long Chen achieve this? It had to be known that this large man was one of the powerful subordinates of the crown prince. Even Yu Qianxue would need at least ten moves to defeat him.

However, in front of Long Chen, he was unable to exchange even half a move before being caught.

The first three times he was smashed into the ground, he still had the power to fight back. But by the fourth time, he was already unconscious.

By the fifth time, he had no spiritual qi left to protect his body, which caused his bones to shatter. The pain then woke him up, and he was smashed into the ground again, knocking him unconscious once more.

In the end, Long Chen smashed him into the ground eighteen times. Eventually, he sensed the weight in his hand lighten. When he raised his gaze, he discovered that all that remained in his grasp was a thick arm. The force of Long Chen's strikes had propelled the large man's body through the air, sending him hurtling and crashing into a nearby wall.

Upon impact, the man's body went limp, resembling a lifeless mass of mud. He just lay there motionless, his fate hanging in the balance, as the extent of his injuries and his state of being—whether alive or dead—remained uncertain.

Long Chen was now holding two severed arms, overflowing with icy killing intent. Just by looking at his ominous appearance, the people in the vicinity quivered endlessly.

“Sorry, it’s definitely my heart-devil causing trouble again. I must stay calm...” Long Chen tossed aside the arms and put on a regretful appearance.

“Bullshit!”

Just then, Long Chen heard a spiritual roar from the bronze cauldron. His heart-devil was enraged.

It was Long Chen himself being violent, yet he blamed his heart-devil while the latter was unable to even leave the bronze cauldron. Thus, he cursed Long Chen’s shamelessness.

Long Chen pretended not to hear and shrugged. “I already told you that my temper isn’t good. It’s your own fault for not listening!”

Long Chen’s temper came and left quickly. Just now, he had seemed like he was about to murder them all, and now he seemed fine as if nothing had happened. These sudden turns left Yu Qianxue and Zhu Yifeng flabbergasted.

“You... you... you sneak attacker! How shameful!” One of them roared at Long Chen's indifference.

As a result, a hand suddenly struck his face, causing half of his face to collapse. He was then smashed into that meat patty of a large man who was stuck on the wall.

“AH!”

As a result, that person fainted, but the large man woke up from the pain.

His body was a shattered mess, with every bone broken and his Blood Qi in complete disarray. As a result, agonizing waves surged through him, causing him to writhe and convulse as if countless startled rabbits were stampeding over his injuries. The excruciating torment became unbearable, pushing him to the brink of wishing for a swift death.

"Cough, my apologies. I tend to be a bit heavy-handed. Next time, I'll be more careful. Also, I should advise you to keep your voices down so I'm not startled. It's rude to point at people. Also, take note of your tone and attitude when speaking. In fact, it would be best if you just didn't speak to me. After all, life is very precious. A person's life is already short, and there's no point in taking shortcuts!"

Long Chen was now smiling brightly, but that was even more terrifying than his previous appearance. He was like a phantom when he attacked, and they were unable to defend against him.

Those people all retreated in terror. It was only once they were far away enough that they felt safe.

They then quickly pulled off the meat patty man and the other one before slinking away. But just as they were about to leave Long Chen's line of sight, one of them pointed at Long Chen and cursed.

"Just you wait-!"

That person didn't even finish speaking before a flash of lightning pierced his mouth.

Chapter 3975: Dragon Power Test

"Seeing how you're holding out your butt, I can tell that you must need to spit out a few balls of dung. You want to play this game with me? Keep talking and I'll feed that dung back to you." Long Chen had long since noted that this fellow was not obedient, so he had already prepared a lightning sword just for him.

As a result, this lightning sword pierced this fellow's mouth, shattering his jaw. He was fried black by the lightning and passed out.

Now, those people didn't even dare to make a sound, only adding this charred person to the people that they were dragging away. They came tyrannically and left wretchedly.

"I don't understand. Are you all children? Why do you play such low-grade provocation games? Who has so much free time? Why not cultivate? Wasting precious time on such things, you must truly be blessed." Long Chen looked at Yu Qianxue helplessly.

Barely recovered after seeing Long Chen's ruthless means, she snorted. "Don't act so wise like you're more mature. This is a world with constant fighting. Which place doesn't have this kind of in-fighting? That's how you show your value, through constant competition. How else do you know if you are outstanding or inferior? Life is a stage, and if you don't know how to show off your power, you can only live an ordinary life."

"An ordinary life?" Long Chen bitterly smiled. "I wish I could live an ordinary life."

"If you were a member of the imperial family, you would have been banished a long time ago for lacking any ambition. As an imperial disciple, an heir to the Jiuli bloodline, and a follower of the Vermilion Bird, you cannot say such a worthless thing. The imperial disciples have to work hard in order to protect the throne and the people," said Yu Qianxue.

"The logic's not bad, but such childish competition cannot create true experts. Greenhouse flowers might look nice, but a single frost will wipe them all out," said Long Chen disdainfully.

“What nonsense. Are you looking down on my imperial family?!” demanded Yu Qianxue.

“You can treat it as such. I can’t be bothered to explain it to you since none of you would understand. I’ll tell you the truth. As a person, you aren’t terrible. In fact, I can just barely count you as a friend. But I don’t want you to use me. I have no interest in being drawn into the fight between the princes and princesses. One mistake and your imperial family’s blood will flow like a river. My current goal is only to marry Qingxuan. I don’t want to get sucked into your affairs in case I can’t hold myself back,” said Long Chen sincerely.

If this continued, when his temper erupted, he would slaughter a few princes and princesses, and then there would be no way to propose. He would be the enemy of the imperial family.

Long Chen actually wanted to avoid standing out in the Vermilion Bird Empire. He just wanted a few days of peace where he didn’t have to constantly fight and kill. But based on the current trend, he was going to be drawn into a fight again.

“Your words are very arrogant. You think you can make the blood of the imperial blood flow like a river? Haha!” Yu Qianxue sneered.

Long Chen looked at her and also laughed, not saying anything else. Sometimes, naivety was also a kind of power. He wished he could be naive, but he didn’t have that chance.

Yu Qianxue then brought Long Chen down a long passageway. On the way, they saw quite a few imperial disciples. They all stared at him, clearly having heard of him.

However, their gazes were mostly icy or contemptuous, even hostile. There weren’t many friendly faces here.

It was because the imperial disciples were split into factions and branches. These disciples had all chosen their own sides, picking the prince or princess that they supported.

In truth, this could be considered another trial for these disciples, a test of their judgment.

Considering Yu Qianxue’s aloofness and lack of skill in winning people over, other than herself possessing immense power, she had no other strong points.

Thus, other than some guards and aides, she didn’t have the support of any imperial disciples. In this area, she was even worse than Zhu Yifeng, who had two imperial disciples willing to support him. In fact, they were very close to him. As for Yu Qianxue, she had no one.

Long Chen, Zhu Yifeng, and Yu Qianxue arrived at a gate and saw more people in charge of inspecting status plates here. They even made a record of Long Chen and the others before opening the gate.

The next moment, a shockingly ancient aura came out of the gate. This was a giant plaza with all kinds of equipment inside.

As a place for testing the strength of the physical body and training one’s power, there were various pieces of equipment here with dragon marks carved into them. They gave off a heavy feeling. These were all incredibly old items.

“This is the Vermilion Bird Empire’s special dragon power testing grounds, and only cultivators with the strongest physical bodies train here. Also, the units of weight here are measured in dragon power. A single dragon power is the full power of a dragon king or three hundred thousand Jun. One Jun is three hundred thousand Shi, and one Shi is three hundred thousand catties. The catty here is equivalent to the mortal world’s catty. As an ascender from the mortal world, you should have a general understanding of it, right?” explained Yu Qianxue.

“A general understanding? Are you asking me how many catties a dragon force is?” Long Chen rolled his eyes. Probably Xia Chen and Guo Ran would be able to instantly calculate it, but he couldn’t be bothered.

The immortal world’s weights were mostly counted with Shi, and the Shi standard was based on the amethyst granite. It had high density, was easy to cut, and was very common. It was a material that could be found almost everywhere within the nine heavens and ten lands. One square foot of amethyst granite was three hundred thousand catties.

So, in the immortal world, one Shi was three hundred thousand catties. But on the other hand, in the mortal world, one Jun was three hundred thousand catties. The measurement units had changed.

A single dragon force was equal to three hundred thousand of the immortal world’s Juns? It would be impossible to count just how many of the immortal world’s catties that would be.

When Long Chen and the others arrived, there were hundreds of experts training here. All of them were large, physically strong cultivators. In particular, they saw one practicing the horse stance with a short rod. However, veins were throbbing on his forehead. It seemed that whatever that rod was, it was incredibly heavy.

“Big brother, those rods have the weight of a single dragon power. It is the lightest weight here. For him to be able to hold the horse stance for several breaths is already very impressive. I can’t do that. At best, I can hold it for a single breath. Any more, and my body wouldn’t be able to endure it. The strain of holding it would tear apart my meridians. For him to be able to last this long, his maximum lift is probably around three dragon powers. His physical body can be counted as extremely powerful,” said Zhu Yifeng.

Long Chen asked Yu Qianxue, “What is your maximum?”

Yu Qianxue indifferently said, “The imperial family doesn’t focus on the physical body, so I have only reached ten dragon powers. I look forward to seeing how many dragon powers you can lift.”

Although her tone was flat, anyone could hear her pride. Perhaps in the entire Vermilion Bird Empire, the number of women possessing ten dragon powers could be counted on one hand.

“Big brother, you haven’t tested it before, so just try one dragon power first. It’s frighteningly heavy. You can easily get injured if you aren’t careful.” Zhu Yifeng kindly advised Long Chen, feeling worried that for his own pride, Long Chen would directly challenge ten dragon powers. If he was injured from the attempt, it would be embarrassing. Hence, he gave Long Chen a step down from that.

Hearing this, Long Chen patted his shoulder. This child really wasn’t bad. To be able to still possess a kind heart while growing up in such an emotionless environment was truly rare.

Long Chen then looked at that rod with a hint of anticipation in his eyes. After so many years, he finally had a chance to test his power. He slowly reached out his hand.

Chapter 3976: The Difference is Too Great

When Long Chen's hand wrapped around one of those rods, Zhu Yifeng and Yu Qianxue held their breath in anticipation. Long Chen hadn't focused his power. That attitude was like he was just picking up an egg.

The surrounding experts also paused to stare at him, but most of them had mocking sneers. They waited to see him embarrass himself.

This was a common sight here. Many people thought that they were powerful and overestimated themselves here. During their first time, most of them would embarrass themselves. Many of them would even cough up blood from misjudging the necessary power required.

After that, the rod quivered slightly, and Long Chen's expression changed.

"Hahaha!" When they saw his expression change, those experts all laughed.

"He doesn't know how high the heavens are!"

"There really are many ignorant people nowadays."

"Hehe, only the ignorant are fearless..."

However, just as the mocking voices rang out, they came to a sudden stop. The disdainful expressions became one of confusion and then shock.

That terrifyingly heavy rod was easily picked up by Long Chen. Even Yu Qianxue was covering her mouth in shock, while Zhu Yifeng's eyes almost popped out.

Moreover, Long Chen didn't just pick up the rod. He rolled it around in his hand, which almost drove these experts crazy. They didn't dare to believe their eyes.

"A single rod is this heavy? Not good." Long Chen appraised the weight without a hint of joy on his face. He looked solemn.

The dragon expert's voice rang out in Long Chen's mind. "A so-called dragon power is only the most basic power of a matured dragon king. You know, a sacred dragon possesses ten thousand dragon power after becoming a dragon king. As for you... well, I won't say it. Just remember, if you want to change your Seven Star Battle Armor, you'll need at least three thousand dragon power. Only once your physical body reaches that power level can you endure the impact of changing the Seven Star Battle Armor. Of course, three thousand dragon power is only the lowest base. If you want to lower the risk, you should make your physical body as powerful as possible. Three thousand dragon power is only the minimum. If you cannot reach that level, you cannot try it, or you really will lose your life."

"Ten thousand dragon power?"

Long Chen almost dropped the rod in his hand. A sacred dragon was actually such a terrifyingly powerful existence?

Hearts thundered in the room, but the rapid beats didn't belong to Long Chen; instead, they resonated within the chests of everyone else present.

"Big brother... big brother!"

Seeing Long Chen lost in thought as he weighed the rod in his hand, Zhu Yifeng finally called out to him.

Only then did Long Chen recover his wits. At this moment, he saw that everyone was completely dumbstruck.

Long Chen said, "It seems that I overestimated myself. This rod is one dragon power? I'm probably a far cry from the requirement."

Long Chen looked at the rod and sighed. Its weight was truly a blow to him.

"Big brother... no, boss, is it really not difficult for you to hold it? Or is there a problem with the rod? Let me try it- aiya!"

BOOM!

The rod smashed into the ground. As a result, the earth cracked and the training grounds swayed. There was no issue with the rod.

"Big brother, I asked to try it, not for you to throw it at me!" Zhu Yifeng was green with fright. Long Chen had casually tossed the rod to him, but he didn't dare to catch it.

"Sorry, I didn't do it on purpose." Long Chen reached his hand into the ground and pulled out the rod, returning it to its original location.

Yu Qianxue had reached out to press a button that would activate a formation. With it, the rod would be automatically brought back to its original location.

It had to be known that such mistakes were common here. People often dropped these rods. Fortunately, the formation would automatically repair the ground and send the rods back.

It was because there was almost no way to pull these rods out of the ground due to the lack of grip. Hence, for Long Chen to forcibly pull it just like that was truly shocking.

People stared at Long Chen like he was a monster, and they were filled with shock and amazement. Their previous disdain had long since vanished.

After all, experts always received people's reverence wherever they went. They surrounded him, staring at him reverently.

"Senior apprentice-brother, you're so powerful! Why not challenge yourself and see what your limit is? We can help you find the weights," suggested someone.

Long Chen was so powerful that a single dragon power was nothing to him. Hence, they were all interested to know his limit.

The next moment, Long Chen looked at the longest rod. It was only one foot above the ground and had to be lifted with brute power.

“Rise!” Long Chen grabbed it, and in front of countless shocked gazes, he lifted it from its spot.

“A hundred dragon power! Heavens, what am I seeing?!”

All the experts were fully dumbfounded now. They couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

“Double it!”

“Double it!”

“Add another hundred...!”

BOOM!

The training grounds shook as rods covered in dragon marks fell to the ground.

This time, Long Chen was covered in sweat and gasping for breath. He could no longer pull them out of the ground.

“Five hundred... thirty-seven dragon power...”

The experts present were stunned. Long Chen’s limit was five hundred and thirty-seven dragon power. It had to be known that in the Immortal King realm, the highest record in history was two hundred and eighty-seven dragon power. Furthermore, that was a record accomplished by someone at the peak of the Immortal King realm.

As for Long Chen, he was only in the initial Immortal King realm. However, he had broken the record and almost doubled it. Was he really human? No, even a beast race couldn’t possess such power, right?

Actually, the record of two hundred and eighty-seven dragon power was completed by an expert from a beast race. As for the record for a human expert, it was ninety-three.

Everyone stared at Long Chen who was staring at those rods gloomily. Five hundred and thirty-seven. That was a far cry from three thousand. Was he really so weak?

After he had absorbed the ancestral dragon essence blood, his power allowed him to look down on all others in the same realm. Even Kun Tu was defeated by him. Despite that, he remained far from meeting the minimum criteria set by the dragon expert, let alone matching the awe-inspiring prowess of a sacred dragon. It was truly a blow to him.

“Don’t be dejected. You aren’t from the dragon race, so it’s normal for my dragon blood to not raise your power that much. I actually thought that your foundation would put you at three hundred dragon power, but it seems that I underestimated you.” The dragon expert once more spoke to him. Surprisingly, there was a hint of gratification in its voice.

“Senior, are you just trying to comfort me?” Long Chen smiled bitterly. He felt like he had wasted this transcendent blood.

“My dragon race doesn’t know how to comfort the weak. Long Chen, since your foundation is so strong, I have a new idea. Do you wish to gamble?”

Upon hearing this, Long Chen’s heart pounded wildly. He smelled the hint of something good.

Chapter 3977: Dragon Soul Body Forging Art

“Senior, tell me what the good news is!” Long Chen was delighted. It seemed that something good was about to fall into his lap.

“Well, it’s not necessarily a good thing, so whether it’s a blessing or disaster is still uncertain. But since my dragon blood has perfectly merged with your body, your body has undoubtedly surpassed the limits of your human race. Furthermore, through your display just now, I find that the dragon essence blood has changed and become a new seed blooming with new life in your body. Perhaps... and I say perhaps, as it is just a possibility, you could cause this dragon blood to undergo a second awakening. Then the power of your physical body would reach an unprecedented level. It might even surpass mine from back then.” The dragon expert cautiously threw out this possibility, as it had no assurance when it came to this.

“Surpass you? Surpass ten thousand dragon powers? Is that even possible?!” Long Chen’s voice quivered.

“I cannot give you any assurance. All I can say is that the possibility is there. However, it is risky. If you wish to take this path, there’s no going back. If you succeed in this though, it might even be more important than cultivating the Nine Star Hegemon Body Art. But then, whichever path you choose, it is still shrouded in darkness. You need to trailblaze a new path. In other words, if you want to try it, you not only need to think about your unknown path with the Nine Star Hegemon Body Art, but you will also need to add another path that is just as difficult. It will bring an even greater difficulty to your future,” said the dragon expert.

“Senior, can you tell me what your suggestion is first?” asked Long Chen.

“I once created my own body tempering art. This technique was my strongest cultivation technique that allowed me to look down disdainfully on generation after generation of ancestral dragons. But for some reason, when I transmitted it to my descendants, they were unable to inherit it. In the end...” The dragon expert sighed.

“In the end what?” asked Long Chen hastily.

“None of my descendants were even able to gain an initial mastery over it before their bodies exploded in the process. Also, my bloodline has existed for countless years, so I have witnessed millions of my descendants that were blessed with immense talent dying to this cultivation technique. In the end, I stopped transmitting this technique. In the past ten million years, I have been pondering whether this technique was so powerful that the heavens were jealous of it, so they made it so that other than me, no one else could inherit it. But seeing your potential today and your mutated dragon blood, my heart is stirring again. Even so, this is a very dangerous gamble. Very, very dangerous. I don’t know if it will harm you. Perhaps you will also die just like all the others.” The dragon expert’s voice was full of complicated emotions. That weary tone was exceptionally difficult for outsiders to comprehend.

As a peak expert, it possessed its own peak divine abilities, but it was unable to pass down its unmatched cultivation technique. It was a kind of silent pain.

It had helped Long Chen multiple times now, from guiding him through crisis, to bestowing upon him the divine abilities of the dragon race, and even imparting him with its essence blood. In truth, to a certain extent, Long Chen could be considered its heir.

However, this was a technique that could bring about Long Chen's demise. Countless heavenly geniuses of the dragon race had died in their attempts to master this technique.

"Hehe, senior, don't worry. When it comes to me, I am always in an emergency and need to deal with something. As for the future, I'll think about it when the time comes. Just transmit that technique to me. We'll see if it's doable. Isn't just trying it alright?" Long Chen's disease flared up once more. Whether it was a miraculous treasure or a powerful cultivation technique, he had a fatal attraction to all of them.

Moreover, with how cautious the dragon expert was being, Long Chen was completely unable to hold himself back. This was definitely a heaven-shaking cultivation technique.

"This cultivation technique is a modified version of the Dragon Blood Body Tempering Art, known as the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art. While the underlying principles remain similar, the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art encompasses not only essence blood as its foundation but also integrates the spirit, soul, will, mind, blood, qi, and bones into it. Thus, its overall requirements are higher. One is like a constant tempering to increase your power, while the other requires all your seven foundations to be equal. They are linked by a profound connection that cannot be described with words or diagrams. It is extremely mysterious. All my descendants who cultivated the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art died, so I wondered whether it was because my teaching was bad or if they simply didn't learn it right. Later on, I understood that it was both.

"I wanted to pass down this technique, so when I explained it, I went into great detail, repeatedly explaining so that they would remember every little bit. But later on, I understood that it had the opposite effect. Under the principle that the Grand Dao is simple, the more complex you make it and the more detailed you go, the more muddled it becomes. As a result, all the descendants who cultivated my Dragon Soul Body Forging Art were unable to escape the intrinsic thinking and cultivation style of the dragon race. As for my technique, it may appear similar to the dragon race's divine abilities on the surface, but in the end, it is not the same. However, when it comes to how it is different, even after thinking about it for countless years, I was unable to figure it out. The most laughable thing is that I am the creator of this technique, but I only know the what, not the why," sighed the dragon expert.

To have created a world-class divine technique yet not understand it was definitely a very comical thing.

"The Grand Dao is formless, giving birth to heaven and earth; the Grand Dao is emotionless, moving the sun and moon; the Grand Dao is nameless, nourishing all life. No one can possibly explain the mysteries of the cosmos. Our human race likes to use the word Dao to encapsulate all things and their workings within this world, but we cannot clearly explain what this word Dao means. The Grand Dao cannot be put to pen and paper. It is limitless, without borders. Some parts of the Dao appear to be one thing but are actually another. In the end, one can only use one's own experience to judge what is right and what is wrong," said Long Chen.

The dragon expert said, "What you're saying is very reasonable. Although you haven't reached that realm, you are very close to it when you speak. As for perception and comprehension, it is your human race that stands at the peak. Even my dragon race cannot compare to you guys. Thus, after pondering it, I am willing to transmit this technique to you. If you are really able to learn it and transmit it to future generations, then I can already rest in peace."

The dragon expert's voice became a bit emotional toward the end. It seemed that it felt even greater excitement and anticipation than Long Chen.

"This cultivation technique has no mnemonic, so I can only teach you its energy circulation method."

After that, the dragon expert transmitted an energy circulation method for the spirit, soul, will, mind, blood, qi, and bones. However, even with Long Chen's comprehension powers, he was dumbfounded as he was completely unable to understand what this was. Could it even be called a cultivation technique?

"It doesn't matter if you understand it or not. You should study it yourself. The more I teach you, the more narrow your path grows. I don't want to repeat my old mistakes," said the dragon expert.

Long Chen was dumbfounded. All he had been given was an outline, and it was also incredibly general. He didn't even know what the principles behind it were.

"Wait, Seven Star Battle Armor? Seven kinds of energy? Couldn't I...?"

Long Chen suddenly jumped, feeling like he had just seen an unprecedented world before him. It was akin to countless bolts of lightning flashing through his mind. The door to the unknown slowly opened before him.

Chapter 3978: A New Direction

"What? Five hundred and thirty-seven dragon power? Are you sure that this information is accurate?" Yu Xiaoyun stared at his two empresses in shock.

"There is no mistake. Yu Xiaoyun, you are naturally gifted and even possess the Vermilion Bird Divine Radiance. I remember that where you were in the Immortal King realm, your secret record was only three hundred twenty-seven. Who would have thought that the seemingly scholarly Long Chen would actually possess such terrifying power?" said Xu Lanxin.

"There's no way. Even if he has true dragon essence blood in his veins, his body is still that of a human. How can he possess such power?" Yu Xiaoyun couldn't believe it.

Even as a child, Yu Xiaoyun had been exceptionally gifted and possessed shocking power. However, his power was a secret of the Vermilion Bird Empire. So, other than himself, only his empresses were aware of the full extent of his power.

Back then, the Vermilion Bird Divine Radiance appeared when Yu Xiaoyun was born, causing the Vermilion Bird's runes to form on his body. Due to this, he was said to be the rebirth of the Vermilion Bird's son.

Therefore, his physical body was terrifyingly powerful. But as the secret weapon of the Vermilion Bird Empire, his power was a secret to the people.

However, Long Chen's power had even exceeded Yu Xiaoyun's younger days, causing Yu Xiaoyun to not dare to believe it. He had never encountered someone whose power exceeded his in his lifetime.

Moreover, Long Chen had even surpassed him by a full one hundred and ten dragon power. It was unbelievable.

"The High Firmament Academy's youngest dean throughout all of history, perhaps he is even stronger than we imagine! This child truly knows how to hide his power," said Jiang Huixin with a smile. She felt very curious about Long Chen.

"Hmph, even if his power surpasses mine from back then, so what? Strength isn't my greatest talent," scoffed Yu Xiaoyun unhappily when he heard their praise toward Long Chen.

Seeing his angry expression, the two empresses exchanged a look and laughed.

...

"Five hundred and thirty-seven dragon power?!"

"Impossible!"

"That's pure nonsense."

"Princess Qianxue must be intentionally spreading a rumor about him. In the Immortal King realm, let alone a human, not even the dragon race would possess such power."

The news that Long Chen had five hundred and thirty-seven dragon power was spreading like wildfire. As he had broken the record in the Immortal King realm, all the cultivators in the empire soon heard of it.

When they heard it, their first reaction was to think that it was a lie, that the result was definitely an equipment failure or formation malfunction.

As countless people sent runners to verify this report, Long Chen was already in Yu Qianxue's mansion, accompanied by Zhu Yifeng. After all, the latter was now full of worship for Long Chen and refused to leave his side. He even left his own home and stayed at the princess mansion, acting like Long Chen's aide.

This time, Yu Qianxue's guards treated him with the utmost respect. No one even dared to display the slightest disrespect to him.

Thinking of the dragon expert's Dragon Soul Body Forging Art, Long Chen directly went into seclusion.

"This cultivation technique is too general. The dragon senior must have used the principles from the start of its cultivation to create it. But as more details are added, it's easier to make mistakes, leading people off the wrong path. The soul, spirit, will, mind, blood, qi, and bones—the first four are mental energies. Soul, spirit, and will are easy to understand, but what is this mind? If the spirit is the Yuan Spirit and the soul is Spiritual Strength, then wouldn't the will and mind be one thing? Why are they split? Or is the will something different in the dragon race? The will is the will? And the mind is the will too? Is such an understanding right or wrong? If it is a technique of the dragon race, it must have the dragon race's power as a foundation. I only have dragon blood, so I'll have to start with it."

After thinking of a general path, Long Chen entered his cultivation state.

When his golden dragon blood rumbled and ignited, golden flames enveloped his body. However, even as it burned, he didn't sense anything.

But when he used this dragon blood as the ignition point to ignite his spiritual qi, he directly coughed up blood. His body almost exploded.

"Are you a pig?! How can you ignite all your spiritual qi at once?! Are you trying to get yourself killed?!" cursed the dragon expert.

"Oh. I was careless."

Igniting the essence blood was very simple to Long Chen. Thus, he hadn't particularly felt that igniting his spiritual qi would be anything difficult either. As a result, he had overlooked one crucial detail: this time, it wasn't a simple matter of igniting his spiritual qi alone. It involved utilizing the power of his dragon blood to ignite his spiritual qi, an act that nearly caused his entire body to explode in the process.

After his first failure, Long Chen split his spiritual qi into hundreds of portions, igniting one portion at a time.

As expected, it was much simpler this time. His dragon blood and spiritual qi were now burning at the same time, letting him see golden spots appear in his originally white spiritual qi. His spiritual qi was starting to be infected with the aura of the sacred dragon.

After finding this method, he progressed smoothly. In just an hour, all his spiritual qi was burning. He then removed the blockades and let this spiritual qi circulate throughout his body.

When his qi and blood merged, his aura changed. His body now had a sacred light around it.

"AH!"

Suddenly, Long Chen screamed. When he tried using this qi and blood flame to ignite the bones, an agonizing sensation surged through him. It felt as if countless scalding iron brands were raining upon his bones, searing them with relentless intensity, causing golden spots to appear on his white bones.

The golden spots, looking like dragon-shaped runes, gradually spread over his bones. As they branded themselves on the bones, golden energy flowed into the bones.

However, this process was extremely painful. Even with Long Chen's pain tolerance, his face still twisted and veins throbbed on his forehead.

"There's no need to be in such a rush. You can go one bone at a time," advised the dragon expert.

"No need. It's been a long time since I've felt such pain. Why not go all-out?!" Long Chen clenched his teeth.

BOOM!

Long Chen's entire body shook as golden flames engulfed every single bone within his body. When millions of dragon-shaped runes branded themselves onto his bones, Long Chen let out a heaven-shaking roar, exposing the golden light that came even from his teeth.

"Are you trying to kill yourself?!"

The dragon expert was stunned. Let alone a human, even the heavenly geniuses of the dragon race would feel enough pain to want to die when forging their bones.

At this moment, Long Chen's scarlet eyes almost popped out of their sockets, and his entire body convulsed with tremors, unable to withstand the overwhelming power surging through him. A primal, guttural roar emanated from deep within his throat, yet no intelligible words escaped his lips.

However, he didn't give up. He directly used this explosive method to cover his entire skeleton with runes.

After an arduous two-hour ordeal, Long Chen's body finally ceased its incessant twitching. Beads of sweat drenched the ground beneath him, evidence of the immense exertion he had undergone. Moreover, his vibrant countenance now appeared pallid and drained, devoid of its usual vitality.

After resting a bit, Long Chen activated his inner sense and saw that all his bones had become golden with countless runes on them. They were like veins flowing through his bones.

"Hehe, I have a body of steel now." Long Chen sensed the strength of his bones and couldn't help crying out excitedly. He felt like his current bones, supported by these runes, were even stronger than World Domain divine items.

"I understand, I understand!" The dragon expert also cried out emotionally with a quivering voice.

Chapter 3979: Black Robes for a Banquet

"Senior, what do you understand?" asked Long Chen.

"Long Chen, why did you have to be so suicidal?" asked the dragon expert excitedly.

"This doesn't count as suicidal, right? Right now, I should be in the simplest, easiest part of the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art. Based on my calculations, first I'll forge the blood, then the qi, and then the bones. After that, I'll temper the will, soul, spirit, and finally the mind. Don't ask me why I'm doing it in this order because I don't know either. In any case, I feel that starting shallow and then going deeper is best. This is starting with the easiest before moving on to the harder part. I want to complete the bone forging in one go as preparation for the pain of forging the soul. Otherwise, if my will isn't strong enough, I'll probably be crippled," answered Long Chen.

"Could it be that this is the will of the heavens? Long Chen, do you know? The bone forging that you just went through created the divine bone meridians. That is precisely the crux of cultivating the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art! When I taught my descendants this technique, not one of them managed to form these meridians. That is why they were unable to undergo a full circulation of the power in their bodies, which caused the backflow to crush them. It's only when your bone meridians appeared that I understood. This step must be done throughout all the bones at once; otherwise, they won't be fully

linked. Aiya, how could I be such a fool as to not realize this? So many outstanding children died for nothing.” The dragon expert blamed itself for this.

Long Chen had only condensed the divine bone meridians accidentally. After all, these meridians were akin to a giant tree; all the branches, leaves, roots, and trunk had to be completed at once.

However, the dragon expert had been unaware of this despite being the one to create this technique. The pain of this bone forging was so immense that others couldn’t endure it all at once, so they had forged every bone separately.

Once the bones were all forged, they would be like countless puzzle pieces put together. Although they seemed to fit perfectly on the surface, in truth, they were not actually connected. Such a thing would not produce meridians.

Even if meridians did form, they would be fake and not linked. Thus, when their power circulated through the meridians, it led to a complete collapse.

On the other hand, Long Chen’s natural meridians were the result of forging all his bones at once, so there were natural passageways between the bones. Also, with him forging them like this, all his power was spread evenly throughout the bones because of these natural passageways, creating perfect meridians. The dragon expert cursed itself when it saw this.

Long Chen himself had just been blindly doing as he pleased. In fact, he wasn’t even sure what the dragon expert was saying, but it seemed that this step that he had randomly chosen was correct.

“Does this mean that my path is correct?” asked Long Chen.

“It is, it is most definitely correct. This problem that I was unable to figure out after tens of millions of years was just inadvertently solved by you. With this, everything else will be no problem. However, you do need to rest. Stabilize your current power first. Don’t greedily push yourself too far, and don’t do something so stupid again. Just once is enough,” warned the dragon expert.

“Hehe, alright.” It seemed that the dragon expert would be guiding Long Chen properly for everything afterward. Since there was no need for Long Chen to randomly guess, he felt much more relaxed about mastering this technique.

Now, other than the golden dragon blood, Long Chen also possessed golden bones and golden spiritual qi. When the three merged together, they brought him endless power, and Long Chen could clearly sense that his power had gone up a level.

After resting for a few hours, he was fully recovered. He then walked out of the cultivation room and saw Zhu Yifeng and Yu Qianxue waiting for him.

“You’ve finally come out. Any later and I’d have to knock and summon you,” said Yu Qianxue.

“What is it?” asked Long Chen.

“There is a state banquet happening soon, and His Majesty has requested your attendance. Hurry up and change your clothes. You can come with us,” said Yu Qianxue. After that, she handed over a set of robes to Long Chen. These robes were in the standard style of the princes.

Long Chen was startled. Was he being given the status of a prince? Did his stubborn father-in-law have a change of heart? Wasn't that a bit sudden?

"I don't need to change clothes. I only like wearing these black robes." Long Chen shook his head as he didn't like wearing other colors. Also, he preferred the clothes that his women had made for him.

"Ah... that's not a good idea. The imperial family cares a great deal about etiquette. On this kind of occasion, your clothes..." Yu Qianxue frowned. Long Chen's current clothes might be made of decent material, but they were already a bit worn down. It clearly wasn't suited to a state banquet.

"If I have to change clothes, I just won't go. Help me thank His Majesty for the invitation," said Long Chen.

"You...!" Yu Qianxue was speechless. Inviting an outsider like Long Chen to a state banquet was a huge favor, but Long Chen was refusing to attend just because of some clothes.

"If you refuse to wear them, then fine. Let's just go. But if you aren't allowed entrance at the gate, don't blame me!" said Yu Qianxue.

"Big brother, just change! Let me tell you, one time all I did was put a buckler with the design backward, and I was scolded heavily by those dislikable fellows. They'll probably make things hard on you if you wear this!" pleaded Zhu Yifeng.

"These robes have a special meaning to me. It's fine. They won't be the first ones to make things hard on me. Let them do as they please," said Long Chen.

Hearing this, Yu Qianxue helplessly led the way. She felt like she was already quite stubborn, but she was far too docile compared to Long Chen.

"Long Chen, do you have friends?" Yu Qianxue couldn't help asking on the way.

"Of course! I have many," said Long Chen.

"Someone with your smelly temper has friends? Where is the justice in that? Why don't I have a single one?" demanded Yu Qianxue.

"Perhaps your temper isn't smelly enough? If you make it smellier, you'll have smelly brothers and sisters to accompany you," laughed Long Chen.

Yu Qianxue glared at him. "Let me warn you, the state banquet has many rules. Don't randomly speak and implicate me when the time comes."

"More rules?"

Long Chen was startled, seeming to sense something. With his infamous temper, with how he didn't give face to anyone who made things hard on him, why would the emperor invite him to this state banquet? Was the emperor intentionally causing trouble for him?

Would the emperor find an excuse to erase all his efforts so far? No, if that was what he wanted, it should be taken out as a final trump card! Wasn't it too early?

Long Chen didn't know what the emperor was thinking. As he pondered, he was escorted by the guards and arrived at the palace gate.

"Stop!"

As soon as he arrived, a group of people blocked him.

Chapter 3980: Unbridled

To Long Chen's surprise, the people who were blocking him looked rather familiar. One of them was that pale, pudgy Hanlin scholar that he had left in a miserable state.

Today, this Hanlin scholar was wearing golden scholar robes and was fully dressed up. Even his scholar headband was perfectly square-shaped.

Six Hanlin scholars were in charge of registration, handing out gifts, and greeting the guests.

It was because this state banquet was an important affair for the Vermilion Bird Empire, so every single detail had to be meticulously handled. The fact that Hanlin scholars were personally doing the registration spoke volumes about the state banquet's significance, highlighting both the importance placed on it and the high regard the empire held for the pursuit of higher learning.

For these scholars to receive the martial cultivators was also a way to maintain decorum, a way of inspecting the people coming to attend the banquet.

"Oh, it seems that you're not doing too bad. I have to say, your clothes really do make you seem like a decent poser." When Long Chen saw that scholar's sinister gaze, he knew that the latter would abuse his power. But Long Chen didn't mind.

"Arrogance! How dare you spout obscenities before the imperial gate? Guards, take this man away!" shouted one of the Hanlin scholars.

Over ten warriors with golden spears immediately came over and surrounded Long Chen.

"Hold on! This is Long Chen, and His Majesty personally requested his attendance at this state banquet! Who dares to even touch him?" said Yu Qianxue coldly.

Hearing this, the pudgy Hanlin scholar was startled. He had thought that Long Chen was just Yu Qianxue's guard. According to the empire's rules, princes and princesses could bring an outstanding guard to a state banquet twice a year to show how valued they were. That was why this Hanlin scholar wanted to directly kick Long Chen out as revenge for the humiliation that he had given him.

However, to his surprise, Long Chen didn't come under the status of a guard, but as the guest that the emperor had personally invited. Thus, this pudgy scholar just ended up kicking an iron plate.

Long Chen didn't say anything and just looked at the pudgy Hanlin scholar with his arms crossed, as if the latter was a chattering clown, causing the Hanlin scholar's face to flush until it was the same color as pig liver.

“Since His Majesty has requested his attendance, hurry up. Register, take the gift, and move on,” said another tall Hanlin scholar coldly, clearly helping out that pudgy Hanlin scholar.

“Why aren’t you wearing imperial robes?” Just as the tall Hanlin scholar was about to register Long Chen, he eyed Long Chen.

“I don’t feel like it,” responded Long Chen.

“You...!” The tall Hanlin scholar was about to criticize Long Chen when another one grabbed him. After several glances, the tall Hanlin scholar finally swallowed his rage and registered Long Chen, giving him his entrance gift.

After the three of them walked in, that tall Hanlin scholar couldn’t help but demand, “Brother Liang, why did you stop me? Even if His Majesty invited him, with those clothes, I could definitely cause some trouble for him! We had such a good chance to vent. This fellow is too arrogant!”

“That’s right, brother Liang, why did you let him off?” asked the pudgy Hanlin scholar.

“Hehe, you think that I let him off? Just think about it. The Philosopher is attending the state banquet too. When the time comes, hehe...” chortled that Hanlin scholar.

Only then did the others understand. “Nicely played! The Philosopher will definitely put that arrogant bastard in his place!”

“Hahaha!”

The six of them exchanged a look and laughed, as if they could already see Long Chen losing all his face during the state banquet.

“What are you laughing about in front of the imperial gate?! Get back to work!” An overseeing elder barked at them to maintain their decorum.

Actually, Long Chen heard them talking, but he couldn’t be bothered to pay them the slightest attention.

“Big brother, why don’t you just change your clothes? That Philosopher’s position is extremely high. Even my imperial father can’t do anything to him. Moreover, the Philosopher’s face and mouth are all sinister. You’re leaving him an opening to attack you like this,” advised Zhu Yifeng again. He had kept the clothes as a backup even now.

“No need. So what if that Philosopher’s face and mouth are sinister? Even my heart is sinister, so why would I be afraid of him? We’ll see just who should be avoiding who!” Long Chen shook his head. After suppressing his heart-devil, he felt free to be himself. He no longer needed to be so cautious.

After his heart-devil was suppressed, Long Chen felt much more at ease, thrumming with confidence. He felt full of hope for the future, and his senses were also sharper.

Thanks to this, when he cultivated the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art, his intuition told him that he had to forge all his bones at once. The dragon expert even said that he had blindly taken the right path. Without his heart-devil, he felt like he had returned to the time when he had just left the Phoenix Cry Empire and was traveling to a new world.

The Long Chen from back then was so weak that he couldn't even be mentioned in front of his current self. However, the Long Chen from back then had also been exceptionally confident. No dangers made him afraid; no difficulties weighed down on his heart. No matter what happened in the future, he was always confident that he could handle everything himself.

However, as his cultivation base grew along with his power, he found that his confidence was shrinking. He started to worry about success and failure more often, having more and more misgivings.

He had lost that unstoppable courage from his youth. But after sealing his heart-devil, he found that this thing called maturity was another term for having small guts. While it could be said to be wise to consider all things and come up with a plan before acting, it could also be said that the more you did this, the more afraid you were of failure.

But the Long Chen from back then wasn't afraid of failure. Even if he did fail, he felt like he could always try again. It was that kind of confidence, a determination that he could obtain whatever he wanted as long as he worked on it.

Now, Long Chen seemed to have returned to his old self. He was no longer thinking about the future or failure.

At this moment, many people were already inside the palace, including many attendants and guards going back and forth. It was bustling. However, no one even dared to make a loud sound, causing this lively atmosphere to feel rather stifling.

"Why is it so solemn? Isn't it just a meal? Does it need to be so serious?" asked Long Chen.

"Sh, big brother, keep your voice down! A state banquet isn't a family meal between princes and princesses, nor is it entertainment for officials. We only hold state banquets for foreign diplomats. We didn't receive any word beforehand, but based on the scale, we're going to be seeing more than one group of diplomats this time," whispered Zhu Yifeng.

"Foreign diplomats?" Long Chen was startled. Could it be that he was called here because of the diplomats?

"Big brother, Princess Qianxue, can I ask for your help?" asked Zhu Yifeng suddenly.

"Let's go!" Yu Qianxue seemed to know what Zhu Yifeng wanted, so she directly agreed.

Zhu Yifeng was delighted, and brought the two of them into the depths of the palace grounds. After several turns, they arrived at an inner palace.

He had only just pushed open the gates when sharp Sword Qi instantly enveloped the three of them.