

Nine Star 4001

Chapter 4001: Three Thousand Dragon Power

“How can it be happening so quickly?”

Long Chen was startled along with the rest.

“This jade tablet is the Vermilion Bird Empire’s karmic luck talisman, and I’ve had it on me ever since I was born. When I was reunited with my mother again, she told me its origins. It is connected to the Vermilion Bird Empire’s fate grand formation, so for it to crack now means that a great battle has already started.”

Hearing this, Zhu Yunwen and the others were shocked and enraged. Could it be that the eight empires had long since been prepared for this? As soon as their probing was done, they directly launched into war?

All of a sudden, everyone became like panicked ants. Even the always unflustered Zhu Yunwen felt powerless. There was sweat dripping down his forehead.

“Everyone, don’t panic. It’s not as dire as you’re thinking. In a war between empires, besieging the cities is actually not as important as besieging the people’s hearts,” said Long Chen calmly.

“Big brother, what does that mean?” asked Zhu Yifeng.

“Brother Long is saying that until they have no other choice, they will not be throwing themselves to death. They don’t want to lose their people either. For them to launch their attack so quickly is most likely to create a tense atmosphere over the empire. It’s an attack on the commoners’ hearts,” said Zhu Yunwen.

Long Chen nodded. The crown prince truly did see a bit further than the others. Long Chen then said, “Yes, that is what they’re most likely doing. The Philosopher Institute had so many of their people bought by the other empires. So, after spending so much energy and time plotting, there’s no way that their plan is just an all-out assault. They must have disseminated rumors unfavorable to the Vermilion Bird Empire while overexaggerating the benefits and reputations of the other empires. After so many years of brainwashing, along with the scholars pushing them on, quite a few people in the empire already look forward to the coming of the other empires. They are dissatisfied with the Vermilion Bird Empire and hope for the other empires to rule over them, thinking that they can live better lives that way. That’s why, at this time, when the eight empires apply pressure at the border, the true attack is already inside the Vermilion Bird Empire. Those traitors will come out and start spreading information that hurts the Vermilion Bird Empire, hoping for an armed rebellion inside the empire.”

“Those bastards! They really deserve death! Why was our imperial father so foolish as to let those idiot scholars do as they please?!”

Everyone was enraged when they heard this deduction from Long Chen. They clenched their teeth furiously.

“You are disrespecting His Majesty, your own father! Do you not want your life anymore?” barked Zhu Yunwen.

The prince who spoke instantly turned pale after hearing that. He had only said it due to his anger overwhelming him. However, now that he had said it, there was no taking it back.

“Everyone, this never happened, understood? Don’t bring it up again, to anyone,” ordered Zhu Yunwen coldly.

Everyone hastily nodded and that prince was extremely grateful, especially to the crown prince. The latter was using his special status to help this prince cover up his mistake. Otherwise, if this matter was learned by the emperor, this prince would definitely be punished. The crown prince would also be punished for attempting to cover things up.

Long Chen smiled and said, “You did speak wrongly. The emperor is no fool. His intelligence isn’t something that you can imagine, as everything done to the Philosopher Institute was part of his plans. Also, everything that you see now is still fully under control. This internal discord, this spreading of rumors, ultimately won’t be able to cause any major problem. After all, those traitors are never the main force of the empire. The core forces of the empire are still firmly within the hands of the royal family, while the people being swayed are just random rabbles. They aren’t even willing to work for the empire but blame the empire for not giving them better opportunities. Rather than striving to climb, they complain that others succeed through dishonest means, thinking that their poverty is due to rich people stealing their wealth. Their negative energy spreads easily, and the empire decided to allow them to spread their poison in order to numb their enemies, making the latter think that the empire’s people are no longer stable. In truth, even if all those people were to revolt, they would be unable to shake the empire’s foundation. If my guess is correct, this should be the start of the empire’s gamble. While the other side plays mental warfare, the Vermilion Bird Empire pretends to be thrown into disorder. But on the inside, there are no big waves. Mental warfare requires time and the right rhythm, so you don’t need to be panicked just yet. We will continue to work hard at pushing forward, and we will still be on time.”

This deduction mostly settled their frantic emotions, and they couldn’t help feeling ashamed of themselves. Despite being the same age, Long Chen could see far further than them. It was like they were just children who didn’t know anything.

“But if we just let there be so much chaos, how will we reign them in?” Yu Qianxue couldn’t help frowning.

“Reign them in? Naturally through simple brute force. When the empire bares its fangs, it doesn’t matter who is right or wrong. Anyone who raises their blade against the empire is the empire’s enemy, and they must be killed. There will be no laws or justice to protect them. There will only be traitors who need to be slain. Both the invaders and the traitors will all be slain. It is a typical case of the waves washing away the sand, leaving only the gold. After this war is over, the Vermilion Bird Empire will be more unified, stronger than ever,” said Long Chen.

Hearing this, these experts were shaken. If that was true, the population of the empire would probably enter a state of steep decline. It was unknown just how many people would be killed by their foolishness.

However, from the viewpoint of the empire, if a person was disloyal to the empire and joined their enemies, that was no different from raising a blade against the empire. Such a person was truly not worthy of pity.

“Let’s go. We’ll pick up the pace so we can get out as early as possible. Otherwise, the main characters on the battlefield won’t be us,” said Long Chen.

“Yes!”

Everyone nodded fervently. Long Chen was now their mental pillar, and they all listened to him.

Furthermore, Long Chen had also found that while these princes and princesses often fought against each other, they all had bottom lines that they didn’t cross, having their own respect for themselves.

Also, when the empire was truly in danger, they were exceptionally unified. Just that one point was enough for Long Chen to admire the way Yu Xiaoyun and the imperial family raised their children. It could be considered quite impressive in some regards.

According to their original plan, they would have stayed here another day to rest. However, everyone was in a rush, and they were once more willing to take the risk. Thus, they directly charged through the third gate.

When they entered the third gate, they felt like they were at the heart of a tornado, its wild power tearing at them from all directions. Quite a few of them had the flesh ripped from their bodies.

However, they were mentally prepared, so they had all activated their Vermilion Bird bloodline, forming a barrier that just barely allowed them to endure the impact.

On the first level, the pressure came from above; on the second level, it came from in front; and now on the third level, it came from all directions.

Long Chen had many heavy pieces of equipment on him. But he directly tore through the pressure of this place all the way to the tenth step.

When Long Chen reached the ninth step, he found that the pressure had reached two hundred and ninety dragon power. However, the moment he stepped onto the tenth step, his body shook and a kind of violent power almost flattened him to the ground.

The jade plate he had to measure the pressure shattered.

“This is...!” Long Chen looked at the step in front of him and was filled with disbelief.

“Three thousand dragon power?!”

Chapter 4002: First Step of the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art

The jade plate Long Chen was holding was a pressure testing tool that Zhu Yunwen had given him.

Zhu Yunwen had told him that this tool’s limit was three thousand dragon power, and Long Chen had been using it to get an accurate reading of the pressure as he scouted ahead in order to prevent any accidents.

Of everyone present, only Zhu Yunwen possessed such a tool. It was given to him by Yu Xiaoyun, and it was the only one that they had.

Now that it was destroyed, it meant that the pressure here had exceeded three thousand dragon power, causing Long Chen to be filled with shock.

“No wonder I almost broke my bones coming here.”

In that instant, Long Chen felt as though a mountain had come crashing down upon him, nearly causing him to cough up blood. Luckily, he had swiftly retreated to avoid any potential injuries.

“It seems that this part must be passed with everyone’s combined forces. We can only get through by sharing the pressure together. This trial squeezes out a person’s potential to the limit, while also testing their ability to work together.” After scouting this step, Long Chen understood the meaning of this trial.

With this terrifying pressure, no one would be able to pass through, and they had no choice but to work with others to resist this pressure. Furthermore, if their cooperation was flawed, quite a few people would be crushed to death.

“Hmph, I’m trying it! Golden Dragon Battle Armor!”

As golden dragon scales covered Long Chen’s body, a dragon cry rang out and he stepped forward.

BOOM!

The moment Long Chen’s foot touched that step, an explosive sound reverberated and countless images of the Vermilion Bird materialized. These spectral images pressed down on Long Chen, surrounding him from all sides.

Long Chen’s bones creaked and cracked under the immense pressure. It felt as if the weight of stars was crushing him. In less than half a breath’s time, a bit of blood began to flow out of his nose, eyes, and ears.

Long Chen’s head became murky. However, just as he was about to pass out, he threw himself back.

Like a shooting star flying out of that step, he smashed into the ground, causing sparks to fly about as he bounced further back.

“What’s that sound?” Zhu Yifeng and the others were still cultivating at the first step when they felt the world shake. After that, they saw something flying toward them.

Just then, a golden thing flew over their heads like a whistling tempest.

BOOM!

Finally, they saw Long Chen’s feet slam down on the gate. It was the same gate that none of them could even shake with all their combined power, yet Long Chen managed to create a dent in it.

Following that, Long Chen slowly slid down like a pancake thrown against a wall. The descent was accompanied by a terrible, resonating sound echoing through the surroundings.

“Long Chen!”

Yu Qingxuan hastily ran over to him. Only then did the others react and surge forward.

When Long Chen peeled himself off of the gate, they were shocked to see that his golden scales were shattered, and he looked like he had been badly beaten. His appearance was horrifying.

“I... I’m fine.”

It took Long Chen a while before he managed to breathe normally. He then started healing. Fortunately, his physical body was very powerful and could easily heal this kind of injury.

With the Fusang Trees and Moon Trees in the primal chaos space, he had plenty of life energy to draw on, so he didn’t need to worry about these kinds of injuries.

Under everyone’s questioning, Long Chen explained the terrifying pressure of the tenth step. He also apologized to Zhu Yunwen as their sole testing plate had been ruined.

“Three thousand dragon power?!”

All of them were horrified, not daring to believe their ears.

“How can that be?! Throughout all of history, such a thing has never happened!”

“This pressure is also like a whirlpool, causing it to be difficult to block. If there is the slightest slip in our cooperation, we might be crushed,” said one woman, looking pale with fright.

Everyone sank into horrified silence. They knew that three thousand dragon power was not something that they could handle. Even if they joined forces, there would naturally be power disparities and weaknesses in their efforts to withstand it.

For example, if a person’s upper limit was one hundred pounds. Ten people working together wouldn’t be able to lift a thousand pounds. Even if they cooperated well, eight hundred pounds would be the upper limit.

A hundred people working together? Then their limit was closer to five thousand pounds. The more people, the more difficult it would be to work together, and the less efficient they were. Although more people meant more power, it was not as simple as a matter of addition.

The worst part was that the pressure here was not in a fixed direction but a constant vortex of chaos. With so many people, it was even harder to go against this pressure. Rather than saying it was like two people trying to lift a weight, it was more like two people trying to lift a frantically struggling beast. The difficulties were completely different.

Before entering the third gate, just enduring the impact of two hundred dragon power had already been incredibly taxing for them. They had failed twice before succeeding.

Although Zhu Yunwen and the others had managed to reach that level already, the twisting and turning pressure around them was tricky to handle. It was a feeling that made them almost spit out blood.

Just two hundred dragon power alone was already extremely difficult for them. Then three thousand dragon power was essentially impossible.

“Brother Long- eh? Where is brother Long?” Zhu Yunwen was just about to ask Long Chen about a plan when he found that Long Chen was already gone.

“Watch out! I’m coming back!”

Just then, they heard Long Chen’s voice far off ahead of them. Then a golden light smashed into the gate again, causing another dent to appear beside the first one.

Just as everyone was still lost in their shock, Long Chen had rushed ahead again.

“Brother Long, are you alright?!”

Zhu Yunwen and the others were stunned. Did Long Chen really intend on barging through on his own? It had to be known that this trial was clearly set up for them to enter together.

“It’s fine. I refuse to believe that I can’t get through.” Long Chen wiped the blood off the corner of his mouth and charged out once more.

Seeing Long Chen’s unstoppable figure, after a moment of stunned silence, Zhu Yunwen and the others’ unyielding wills were also provoked.

Just how much courage and willpower did Long Chen possess to keep attempting such an impossible feat? They, as princes and princesses of the Vermilion Bird Empire, were actually recoiling in the face of this difficulty. The stark contrast between them caused them to feel ashamed, so they all continued pushing themselves.

Long Chen was rushing off all alone, while they were planning on facing it together. If they still couldn’t manage to do it, how could they have any face left?

As a result, Long Chen was repeatedly sent smashing into the gate, which was now riddled with dents. However, Long Chen managed to gradually last longer on the tenth step each time.

The moment Long Chen managed to stand steadily on the tenth step, rumbling sounds burst out of his essence blood. The runes in his blood then condensed into tiny spheres.

“This is...?” Long Chen was startled, not knowing if this was a good thing or a bad thing.

“Excellent. Your dragon blood has produced cores. You have completed the first step of the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art!”

The dragon expert’s voice rang out, sounding gratified as well as excited.

Chapter 4003: Trial by Fire Battleground

“What does it mean for my dragon blood to produce cores?” asked Long Chen.

Long Chen’s dragon blood was originally filled with runes. But now, those runes had condensed into what appeared to be tiny little eggs.

“There’s no need for you to know yet. Anyway, your current condition is very good, even better than I expected. Keep going with this refinement, and it will quicken the pace. After condensing these cores, your room for growth has once more risen explosively. Don’t waste your time,” said the dragon expert.

Long Chen found that after these cores condensed, the terrifying pressure no longer felt so terrible. Long Chen then began to cultivate on the tenth step.

Once his essence blood was refined to the limit once more, Long Chen began to practice his punches and kicks. When his qi and bones were also refined, the golden runes in them also became golden cores.

When all three were refined to their limit, he became completely used to the pressure on the tenth step. He could even walk through the air once more. This forbidden flying space was no longer able to restrain him.

With the blood, qi, and bones strengthened, he started refining his Yuan Spirit once more. It was weird though. His Yuan Spirit was changing, but he was unable to sense it strengthening, which worried him somewhat.

“Senior, what is going on with my Yuan Spirit?” Long Chen was unable to keep himself from asking.

“Just keep refining. When the time comes, I will naturally tell you,” said the dragon expert indifferently.

Feeling helpless, Long Chen could only continue cultivating blindly. To his surprise though, when his Yuan Spirit refinement was complete, Zhu Yunwen and the others started to attempt climbing the tenth step.

Long Chen watched as they worked together to climb the tenth step. He didn’t help.

He knew that this final step was a trial for their cooperation. They had to be able to work together perfectly, to trust each other, to be able to support each other at a moment’s notice.

Long Chen suddenly understood why, despite the intense competition between the princes and princesses, there was no resentment among them, and no one resorted to underhanded tricks.

This trial by fire was a way to maintain their unity as believers of the Vermilion Bird. This trial was also a test of their feelings. Under the support of their faith energy, the imperial family’s bloodline was fully protected. From start to finish, they were one solid block.

When Zhu Yunwen and the others saw Long Chen standing steadily on the tenth step, they were shocked, but it was also the greatest encouragement for them.

If Long Chen could stand on it by himself, there was no excuse for them to not get up as well. At this moment, they no longer knew the meaning of the word fear as they charged up together.

They repeatedly failed. With every attempt, they were blown back. Their formation was thrown into chaos, and people coughed up blood.

With every failure, Long Chen would punch the void, causing a huge ripple that tore apart the terrifying pressure. This way, they were at most injured and were at no risk of dying.

Without that danger, they had no more misgivings. They repeatedly tried multiple formations to distribute the pressure.

With Long Chen present, their morale was high, so they continuously tried to climb up. As for Long Chen, he was facing off against all the pressure alone. His power was also constantly growing.

A day later, they finally managed to climb onto the tenth step. The moment they managed to do so, the Vermilion Bird in their manifestations soared into the heavens, forming one giant bird.

That giant bird was the combined body of all their manifestations, and it unleashed a sacred light upon them all. Immersed within that light, a trace of that sacred aura also appeared on Yu Qingxuan and the others' bodies.

"It's the Vermilion Bird Divine Blessing! It's a repayment of our faith energy! We have actually received the blessing of the Vermilion Bird! Imperial father, we succeeded!" Zhu Yunwen and the others cried out emotionally.

Long Chen didn't know what this repayment of faith energy was, but when this divine light shone on them, he sensed sacred energy entering their bodies, causing their auras to change.

Just then, the huge gate in front of them slowly opened. Long Chen and the others exchanged a glance.

"Let's go."

When Long Chen stepped forward, Zhu Yunwen and the others also followed without waiting to investigate how they had exactly changed.

"Kill!"

When they stepped through the gate, they heard roaring, and Long Chen was startled.

"The devil race!"

BOOM!

Long Chen then unleashed a punch that shattered the surrounding space. As a result, countless devil experts were blown apart, but not a single drop of blood appeared.

"It's a simulation of a battlefield!"

Only then did Long Chen realize that these devil experts were replicated by a formation. They didn't actually have bodies of flesh and blood.

At this moment, Zhu Yunwen, Yu Qianxue, and the others also saw the situation here. Yu Qingxuan said, "It's a battlefield trial by fire."

Suddenly, they saw blood. One of the imperial disciples was struck by a spear from a devil expert, and it pierced straight through his shoulder.

"No, the devil experts are truly from the devil race! Everyone, be careful! You can easily lose your life here!" Long Chen's divine sense swept through the battlefield and he instantly noticed quite a few Blood Qi fluctuations.

“This trial by fire is a battleground! Battle is how you fight for the right to survive! If you are careless, you really will die here! Warriors of the Vermilion Bird Empire, we are no longer children hiding under the wing of our imperial father! This trial by fire is a rehearsal for when we step onto a true battlefield! Slaughter them!” shouted Zhu Yunwen.

“Kill!”

The imperial disciples unleashed furious roars and began attacking, not caring whether the devils were real or illusions. They treated each and every devil as if it posed a genuine threat, determined to eliminate them all.

Also, these devil experts were not weaklings. All of them had combat experience, and although they were in the Immortal King realm, their power was not weak. If they were underestimated, these disciples really might be killed by them.

“Brother Long, this place doesn’t suit you. Why don’t you go onward? We’ll follow from the rear,” said Zhu Yunwen.

Although their powers had crazily grown during this time, they all knew that Long Chen was growing even faster than them. Thus, Long Chen would purely be wasting his time here. It would be better for him to scout ahead. It would save time and help them prepare for the next danger.

Long Chen nodded, and after imploring Yu Qingxuan and the others to be careful, he set off alone. There was another step up ahead, but this step was a thousand miles away. When he stepped onto it, he saw that the devils on the battlefield were a bit stronger and more numerous than before.

However, it was only a slight difference. With Long Chen’s current power, he blasted apart the enemies with a single punch. That wasn’t even his full power, but he already blasted a path straight through them.

Long Chen quickly reached the tenth step. The devil experts here had gone from the initial Immortal King realm to the peak of the Immortal King realm. However, they still weren’t enough to pose a problem for Long Chen.

Long Chen arrived in front of the gate and didn’t waste any time, directly passing through it. On the other side of the gate, a cold devil qi poured upon him.

“World Kings?”

Chapter 4004: The Winged Devil Race Again

Countless devil experts attacked Long Chen as soon as he passed through the gate. This time, their cultivation bases were no longer in the Immortal King realm but in the World King realm.

BOOM!

A devil expert’s saber slashed into Long Chen’s shoulder. However, its saber was the one shattered. Its body also exploded, the fragments of its corpses scattering to the ground.

“Damn, just how powerful is my current physical body?”

Long Chen simply wanted to test the power of his physical body by receiving this attack. However, he hadn't expected the resulting backlash to directly blow up the attacker.

Seeing the other devil experts attacking, Long Chen just stood there and allowed them to attack him. As a result, they were all blown apart just from attacking him. The replicated devil experts turned to dust, and those that possessed actual physical bodies exploded into chunks of flesh.

Long Chen raised his arms. Looking at his own hands, he was overjoyed. The current him was only in his normal state. He hadn't summoned his Dragon Blood Battle Armor, but he was already this powerful.

This trial by fire had truly made his power soar. The Dragon Soul Body Forging Art was truly terrifying, beyond his expectations.

With a roar, Long Chen suddenly shot forward like a shooting star, blowing apart all the devil experts who were in his way. They might as well have been clumps of paper.

That refreshing feeling of blasting through his enemies made Long Chen laugh delightedly. With this power, who could block him? Long Aotian, Kun Tu, who cared? He would crush them with a single punch next time.

BOOM!

Suddenly, Long Chen came to a stop. His body finally met an object that he couldn't blast through, and the high-speed impact left him with stars spinning in his eyes. After stabilizing his body, he slowly climbed up and realized that he had reached the tenth gate.

"Fuck!"

Long Chen rubbed his head as an egg-sized bump rose out of his forehead. This gate was too hard, wasn't it?

He circulated his life energy, and when the lump went down, he walked through the slight crack that had appeared when he crashed into it.

As soon as he did so, a sharp claw whistled toward him. Long Chen then raised his hand and caught that claw with his bare hand. The attacker was a ferocious-looking devil expert covered in scales.

With its claws caught, the devil expert suddenly opened its mouth, and a blood-colored sword shot out of it.

Long Chen twisted his head, narrowly dodging the sword. Just then, the devil expert's other claw silently stabbed toward his abdomen. Its reactions and moves were all quick and vicious.

BANG!

Long Chen raised his foot, striking the devil expert in the abdomen. The immense power sent it flying while its arm remained in Long Chen's grasp.

"Divine Venerate realm. It has both power and combat experience. I don't think everyone can pass through..." Long Chen's expression changed.

Considering Long Chen's current power, for him to have not killed that devil expert with this kick meant that its physical body was extremely powerful. Furthermore, it had immense combat experience and was also capable of using magical arts. This was no longer a simple trial by fire.

The first to third levels were pressure trials, and the fourth to sixth levels were combat trials. But the fourth and fifth levels were actually just a warm-up for this cruel battlefield in the sixth level.

Just as Long Chen sank into thought, the devil expert that he had kicked away came roaring back.

Long Chen then unleashed a punch, and that furious roar was instantly cut off. This devil transformed into a rain of blood.

"It was a true body of flesh and blood, not an ordinary puppet. No wonder it could use magical arts," murmured Long Chen.

It seemed that this trial land was also a prison with an unknown number of devil experts inside. They were released inside when the trial was activated.

While these devils were not Supremes, their presence exuded an ancient aura, suggesting that they were not beings from this era. Furthermore, their strength far surpassed that of ordinary Divine Venerates.

Also, the way they activated their magical arts and divine abilities was different. They were activated rapidly, and the slightest carelessness would cause a person to be struck by it. This trial was truly bloody.

However, when Long Chen entered, there was only a single devil beside him, not a huge army. Clearly, this trial also gave people some buffer room.

Suddenly, the space quivered once more, and another devil materialized. It immediately pounced on Long Chen, only to be swiftly sent flying with a single kick.

That creature lay on the ground, but it didn't give up. Pressing with its feet, it shot a bone arrow directly at Long Chen. The projectile reached him almost instantaneously after being unleashed.

Long Chen managed to catch the bone arrow, but he was taken aback by its immense power which caused his hand to tremble slightly.

At the same time, a piercing scent entered his nose. He then saw many small holes at the tip of the bone arrow with black spots inside.

"There's poison?" Long Chen's heart shook. If struck by this thing, it would be fatal.

Just then, that devil expert attacked once more with a sharp bone blade.

Unbothered by it, Long Chen shattered the bone blade with a punch and smashed the devil expert into the ground. At the same time, three more bone arrows shot out of its back. Its bone arrows were shockingly powerful.

"This thing's too dangerous. I'm confiscating it." Long Chen tossed the bone arrows into the primal chaos space.

The devil expert let out a furious roar as it continued to struggle wildly, but Long Chen was determined and kept pressing it into the ground. As he observed the creature, he noticed its teeth flickering with a cold light. Without hesitation, Long Chen summoned a pair of pliers, ready to take action.

Even with all the devil's struggling, Long Chen managed to pluck out all its sharp teeth. He only released it after it was no longer a threat.

The devil roared, but having lost its blade, bone arrows, and teeth, it could only hit Long Chen with its fists, unable to harm him. Long Chen simply kicked it away.

He didn't slay it, because he knew that once it was dead, the formation would replace it.

The reason he did this was because he was worried about Yu Qingxuan and the others being injured by this devil expert. The poison arrows would instantly kill the imperial disciples if they were struck.

Long Chen then continued onward. When he encountered dozens of devils, he stripped them of their fatal weapons and then ignored them. After walking thirty miles, they stopped chasing him and returned to the entrance. Under the control of the formation, their movements were limited to a certain area.

Long Chen encountered more and more devils, and they grew increasingly powerful. On the sixth step, a man with bat wings blocked his path.

"Winged devil race? And a Supreme too." Long Chen's heart shook.

"Damnable human race, do you know what you've done?!"

To his surprise, this winged devil expert actually spoke.

Chapter 4005: Beginning Soul Refinement

Could it be that this wasn't a puppet? Long Chen stood in front of this expert, sensing his powerful Supreme fluctuations.

"Inferior human race, you dare to enslave the mighty winged devil race?! You will be cursed for eternity, rotting away in pain, forever vanishing from this world!" roared the winged devil.

"No, he can't see me. He's still a puppet..." Long Chen looked at the latter's lifeless eyes and murmured to himself.

"Damnable human race, you've blasphemed the mighty winged devil race! You will pay a painful price for your foolishness!"

The winged devil continued to roar furiously. However, as it repeatedly cursed and roared, it kept repeating the same things.

He kept saying the same things as he walked around, not even looking at Long Chen.

When Long Chen walked forward a few steps, that winged devil's body suddenly quivered and his eyes glared at Long Chen. Within those lifeless eyes, a flame-like diagram appeared.

"Die!"

The winged devil roared and shot toward Long Chen, its claws like hooks aiming for his head.

The claws were as quick as lightning and emitted an ear-piercing explosion. However, Long Chen snorted and simply punched away his claws.

As a result, the winged devil's claws were shattered, but bloody marks appeared on Long Chen's fist.

"My defenses are finally broken."

Looking at the wounds on his hands, Long Chen finally knew how far his physical body had been strengthened.

A Supreme Divine Venerate winged devil using his sharpest claws was barely able to penetrate his defenses. That was a reality that he found hard to believe.

If it was before, such an attack would require him to summon the Dragon Blood Battle Armor, and even then, he would not dare to receive it with just his body. He would definitely use his Minghong Saber.

However, it merely caused some bloody marks now, while his opponent's claws were directly shattered. So, it was clear that he still had an absolute advantage in terms of power and defense.

The winged devil roared and his wings quivered, slashing down like blades.

Long Chen then blocked eight of its attacks. These wings were able to pierce his skin but unable to slice apart his muscles, let alone reach his bones.

"Now my physical body really is unrivaled."

Long Chen was overjoyed as he fought. This winged devil's claws and wings were comparable to the strongest World Domain divine items. However, his basic attacks were unable to cause Long Chen any substantial injuries.

In the end, the winged devil's claws and wings were torn apart. Just like before, Long Chen didn't kill his opponent, leaving them for Yu Qingxuan and the others. One reason was as a warning to them about these opponents, while the other was to tell them that he was still doing well up ahead.

As he continued onward, more winged devils appeared. Sometimes, there would be two together or even three. But Long Chen always tore off a wing or cut off an arm before continuing onward, leaving the injured ones for the royal disciples to face.

That way, the level of danger would drop, but the enemies' actual combat power wouldn't be reduced too much, making it a good trial for the imperial disciples.

As Long Chen ascended to the seventh step, he was confronted not only by the formidable winged devils but also by a host of other powerful devil races. All of them were very powerful.

Long Chen rushed through them and crippled the dangerous ones. Only when he felt like they no longer had the power to one-shot Zhu Yifeng and the others did he continue.

On the eighth and ninth steps, the devil experts were in groups, and there were tens of thousands of them. Even Long Chen had no choice but to activate the Dragon Blood Battle Armor. Only in this state could he prevent himself from being drowned by their numbers.

Against so many of them, even Long Chen was left disoriented and lost. He tried to break through their formation several times without reaching the tenth step. He was repeatedly forced back.

It was because Long Chen didn't wish to kill them all. He didn't know if that would cause them to vanish and not be replaced. If he killed them all, the imperial disciples would have no training partners, and it might ruin their advancement.

Having reached the sixth level, Long Chen could already tell the tempo of the trial. Every level had good things inside with a steady increase in difficulty that pushed people just the right amount. He couldn't ruin it and pull any cheap tricks, or the others might not be able to pass the further levels.

After a couple of tries, Long Chen finally managed to charge through the devil experts. When he reached the tenth step, the violent pressure once more appeared.

The devil experts here had gone from the initial Divine Venerate realm to the peak of the Divine Venerate realm. Although they were not Double Supremes, peak Divine Venerates still had terrifying power.

The worst thing about this level was the immense pressure that Long Chen was under, while the devil experts remained unaffected. As soon as he stepped up, several devil experts attacked him.

Hence, he retreated to the nine steps, but the devils there attacked him directly. Keeping his calm, he fought off those devils on the ninth step, took a breath, and returned to the tenth step.

As soon as he did, it was like lead was poured through his body, causing his speed to plummet and his reactions to slow down. But his opponents were still as quick as lightning.

As a result, Long Chen didn't even last a single breath's time before being forced back. He didn't even manage to remember what those attacking devils looked like.

"It's too difficult just being by myself. The pressure is all concentrated on me," cursed Long Chen.

He had a thought to throw off the heavy equipment. That would reduce the pressure and increase his speed. However, he kept them on. If he took them off, the effect of this trial would plummet, and there was also his face to consider. Hence, he gritted his teeth and continued.

Golden scales covered his entire body as he attacked the devils on the tenth step. Their weapons struck his body, causing his Blood Qi to surge and churn within him.

However, Long Chen clenched his teeth and persevered. Although it was difficult fighting while he was slower than them, this trained his reaction speeds and perception.

In the end, Long Chen was able to last an hour on the tenth step, but he was still forced back to rest. That wild tempest of attacks drained his energy.

At this time, Yu Qingxuan and the others had yet to reach the sixth step. But based on Long Chen's estimation, they should have reached the fifth step.

After resting a bit, Long Chen prepared to attack the tenth step once more when the dragon expert spoke to him.

“Enter the next phase. Start the soul refinement!”

Chapter 4006: Splitting the Mind in Two

“Refine my soul now? Are you sure that you’re not joking?” Long Chen almost didn’t dare to believe his ears.

Refining the soul required one’s entire heart and mind to enter the meditative state. But with so many devil experts here, how was he supposed to enter that state? As soon as he did, wouldn’t he be turned into a corpse by these devils?

“Of course, I’m not joking. You will need to split your mind in two, fighting while refining the soul. You see, the dragon race possesses two horns, one Yang and one Yin. We are a body of two souls, capable of handling dual thoughts effortlessly. I know that it’s difficult for your human race, but it must be done. This cultivation technique is my creation, and there is only one path to follow. You must conquer this step,” said the dragon expert.

“But it’s impossible. It’s not like I can walk while looking left and right at the same time, remembering all the different sceneries, and reacting accordingly for each situation. Unless...” Long Chen suddenly had an unbelievable thought.

He had been about to say unless he released his heart-devil. However, as soon as he thought of his sealed heart devil, he knew that it would be impossible.

“Try it!” urged the dragon expert.

Feeling helpless, Long Chen could only do as the dragon expert said. He then stepped onto the tenth step once more, knowing that the only thing he could do was continue onward.

However, he had just drawn the energy of his blood, qi, bones, and spirit into his spiritual space when those devils beat him black and blue. He had no choice but to retaliate. As a result, the soul refinement came to an end.

He then once more entered the soul refinement state. Again, the moment his mind sank into his spiritual space, his body lacked any direction and was beaten again.

Long Chen clenched his teeth. Feeling annoyed, he decided to use his body’s instincts to fight while his mind focused on soul refinement. In any case, the Dragon Blood Battle Armor was powerful enough that they would be unable to kill him.

However, this thought was cut off by the dragon expert. “You must learn to split your mind. It is very important to you. I don’t care what method you use, but there are no tricks or cheats that can get you past it!”

It was very firm, leaving Long Chen no room for negotiation. Hence, he helplessly tried again.

But every time his mind entered his spiritual space, it was forced to be called out to fight. There was no way for him to do both at once.

Long Chen tried many times and failed every time. In the end, he had no choice but to retreat in order to heal. While recovering, he pondered how he was supposed to split his mind.

Long Chen even thought about releasing his heart-devil and striking a deal, but he abandoned that thought as it was too dangerous.

The true dragon race had two souls? Then this was something of utter simplicity to them, but Long Chen couldn't figure out how to do it.

No matter how he thought, he was unable to figure it out. Long Chen cursed furiously. Of course, he didn't dare to curse the dragon expert, so he simply cursed himself for being dumb.

But all that cursing was useless. He simply couldn't do it. For now, he could only vent his fury on these devil experts.

To his surprise though, after mindlessly attempting it several times, he felt like he had grasped something.

However, that feeling was still elusive. When he started fighting the devil experts, that feeling grew stronger.

It was as if without realizing it, some mysterious energy appeared to guide his power, making Long Chen feel like his mind had truly been split in two.

This energy was like a key that could unlock the potential in his body. But while the key was now there, he had no idea how to use it.

As Long Chen tried and tried, he stopped thinking about it and just continued to fight the devil expert. He didn't refine his blood or refine his soul, just mindlessly fighting.

When his heart was no longer impatient, he clearly felt his qi grow calm and his head grow clear. He then entered a strange state.

Right now, Long Chen tried to split his mind in two again, and as he fought, a large amount of golden energy flooded his spiritual space, delighting him.

However, that delight instantly caused the golden energy to come to a stop. When he tried to intentionally enter that state again, he found himself unable to enter it.

Long Chen then calmed his mind, trying to find that feeling again. But no matter how he tried, he was unable to, leaving him so frustrated that he wanted to give up.

After he rested a bit and thought back, a spark of understanding struck him.

"No desires can lead to what you seek?"

Long Chen once more stepped onto the tenth step. This time, he didn't think about splitting his mind. He just fought the devil experts without worries or joy.

When his mind was calm, he once more tried splitting it in two. As a result, he succeeded this time.

Long Chen kept himself steady. As he fought, he circulated the energy of his blood, qi, bones, and spirit, sending their energy into his spiritual space. It then gradually turned golden.

However, this state only lasted a few breaths' time before stopping. Even so, Long Chen didn't panic or get flustered. He simply continued to fight. After a bit, he once more entered that state.

This was an empty-mind state in which he did his best to make himself forget about everything, to make himself indifferent to everything, as if he was just a spectator watching himself.

The feeling faded quickly once again. But this time, it didn't return, so Long Chen went back to rest.

Based on Long Chen's estimation, he had to be in his peak condition to enter this state. If he was tired, it would be very difficult to enter it.

After repeatedly resting and fighting again, Long Chen gradually grasped this feeling. He was able to stay in that state longer and longer.

However, for Long Chen, splitting his mind was a special state, and it was not something that he could maintain. In other words, he was able to enter this state now, but he couldn't control when it faded.

"Remember this feeling. It will be very important to you," said the dragon expert.

"Senior, what is this power?" Long Chen couldn't help asking, feeling lost. This was something completely incomprehensible to him.

"Just remember it is all. I will tell you later. It is the crux of the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art, and it will be your foundation for reaching higher realms. This is something that both your human race and my dragon race have. But it is called different things, and our comprehension of it is also different. I would not be able to explain it to you clearly, so you don't need to ask," said the dragon expert.

Long Chen nodded. Indeed, the Dao was not something that could be imparted with just words. There truly was no way to explain the Grand Dao, as every person had their own experiences and their own unique comprehensions.

While Long Chen was cultivating within the Vermilion Bird trial by fire, the Vermilion Bird Empire was already in a state of chaos.

Chapter 4007: Scourges Last for Thousands of Years

The Vermilion Bird Empire descended into chaos as large armies amassed along their border, pressing them on all sides. It felt as if eight sharp blades were pointed at their gates, a signal that war was about to break out.

For the commoners of the Vermilion Bird Empire, who had not experienced any war in hundreds of thousands of years, this was utterly terrifying.

As fear gripped them, countless people began to flee the cities, and all kinds of wild rumors were flying about. Some cunning propagandists, taking advantage of the situation, deliberately stoked the waves of hearsay, ensuring that these alarming tales spread far and wide.

The rumors ran rampant, claiming that war had already started and that the empire's army lay in ruins. Some even said that the capital would quickly become a sea of fire, and soon, all of them would die.

Adding to the turmoil, some people even released fabricated diaries of people who supposedly committed terrible acts for the Vermilion Bird Empire. This deliberate slander only served to further sow chaos and discord, unsettling the hearts and minds of the people.

As a result, the commoners began to protest against the royal family, with some even welcoming the invading armies into the empire, wanting them to lead the people to a better future.

Just like that, even before the war had begun, the interior of the empire had descended into complete disarray.

At this moment, a thick layer of haze covered the sky, casting a somber and chilling atmosphere over the once lively capital. The once vibrant streets were now filled with patrolling soldiers, a sign that the city was on high alert.

With the empire in chaos, soldiers were recruited throughout the entire empire, and the offered salary was also very generous. However, to go against eight other empires was simply madness. The power disparity was very clear, and everyone knew that they couldn't possibly win.

As a result, even before the clash of armies, the people's hearts were already broken. One significant factor contributing to this was the haunting memory of Long Chen's merciless bloodbath at the Philosopher Institute, where numerous scholars lost their lives.

This act was now perceived as eliminating dissidents under a tyrannical ruler. Everyone thought that those scholars had pointed out all the corruption in the empire, so the empire had decided to silence them.

In any case, all kinds of unfavorable rumors for the empire were going around. With this mix of truth and falsehood, the people's hearts were like a plate of sand in complete disarray.

Within the palace, Yu Xiaoyun's expression was dark and his killing intent was terrifying. Seeing him like this, none of the officials in the palace dared to speak up.

"All of you really did get too used to peace! You don't even know how to fight! They just intimidate you and you are already turned into this?! You've lost the face of the Vermilion Bird!" roared Yu Xiaoyun.

Those officials quivered with fright, not daring to make a sound. It had to be known that when the emperor's anger got the best of him, no one would dare to face his wrath.

"My Vermilion Bird Empire has a thriving populace skilled in culture and martial arts! We have reached unprecedented glory! Tell me, why is the empire unable to fight back?!" roared Yu Xiaoyun.

Yu Xiaoyun's gaze swept over the officials, princes, and princesses. But no one dared to respond. The entire palace was so silent that you could hear a pin dropping.

"Yunwen, you are the crown prince! Tell me how the empire has fallen to this extent!" demanded Yu Xiaoyun.

If Long Chen were here, he would be shocked to see the crown prince, Yu Qingxuan, Zhu Yifeng, Yu Qianxue, and all the other princes and princesses here in the palace.

That 'Zhu Yunwen' stood when he was questioned. Clenching his teeth, he said, "This is the natural result of valuing letters over arms. Too much peace caused people to sing and dance, while martial arts became useless. Then the scholars grew to the point of degrading martial arts. Our soldiers trained and risked their lives for hundreds of years, but a bunch of scholars who merely studied for a few years suddenly got higher positions than them. Didn't you personally write that learning is above all else? Now that battle has descended, there is no time to prepare the umbrella for the rain. There are no soldiers who want to fight for us. Yet, you blame us? That is not the display of a noble emperor."

Hearing Zhu Yunwen say such a thing, everyone in the palace was horrified. They stared at him in disbelief.

"Impudence!"

As expected, Yu Xiaoyun furiously roared, "You dare to speak to your emperor like that?! You are blaming me for being blind, so I have to suffer the consequences of my own actions?!"

Zhu Yunwen clenched his teeth in the face of the furious Yu Xiaoyun. He seemed to throw caution to the wind.

"I do not dare to offend you. But too much peace has caused martial power to fall out of favor. Instead, a bunch of sweet-talking scholars rose in position. When martial arts have no more use, they naturally fall out of favor. It is already considered something low-class amongst the people, and who wouldn't wish to strive for a higher status? Martial artists are martial artists, scholars are scholars. But you force us to have both. Long Chen has said that scholars and learning are for talking reason with others. But training martial arts is what makes others talk reason with us. If we are to practice martial arts, why must we also learn to talk reason? It costs us so much time that we could have spent strengthening ourselves, tempering the sharpness that a martial artist should have. Now, we have what you wanted. Everyone has great learning and skill, but lacks the will and determination to fight for their lives. They don't dare to fight their enemies, so just who are you going to blame for that? The battlefield requires iron men, not a bunch of useless scholars. If those scholars like to talk reason so much, why not have them talk reason with the eight empires?"

"You dare! Bring this unfilial son away! Lock him in the little black room for ten days!" shouted Yu Xiaoyun.

"Imperial father, you can't!"

All the princes and princesses cried out. Ten days in the little black room? Other than Long Chen, no one else could endure it. It was no different than killing him.

"Your Majesty!" Even the two empresses spoke up.

"Five days! Anyone else who speaks up can go in with him!" shouted Yu Xiaoyun. He seemed to also feel like ten days was too long, but he refused to give no punishment at all.

"Dismissed!"

Yu Xiaoyun stood, swung his sleeves, and left.

His two empresses hastily followed him, while the officials and others silently left. It seemed that even the palace was also in chaos.

However, when Yu Xiaoyun, Jiang Huixin, and Xu Lanxin returned to the gate of the Vermilion Bird's trial by fire, Yu Xiaoyun's expression relaxed a great deal. His former rage was gone.

It turned out that everything from before was just an act to create the illusion of an oppressive atmosphere hanging over the empire. They even had actors disguised as the crown prince and the others, all for the eyes and ears of their enemies to see. After all, the fact that Long Chen and the others had entered the trial was a secret.

"They've already reached the sixth level. They clearly know our situation and are doing their best," said Jiang Huixin.

"We can only stall for as much time as possible. Who knows whether it is even possible to pass this unprecedented trial?" said Xu Lanxin worriedly.

"Don't worry, with that little brat present, there definitely won't be any problems," said Yu Xiaoyun.

"Xiaoyun, you really have such confidence in him?" asked Xu Lanxin curiously.

"It's not that I have confidence in him. I only have confidence in the Heavenly Daos."

"What does that mean?"

"A good person has a short life, but bad people have long lives. A scourge like him will definitely live thousands of years at least," said Yu Xiaoyun.

Xu Lanxin: "..."

Jiang Huixin: "..."

Chapter 4008: Endless Sea of Fire

On the tenth step of the sixth level, Long Chen was under immense pressure as he fought the devil experts. Now, his movements had reached the level of being able to keep up with their speed even under this pressure.

However, he was only able to last for at most four hours. After all, the immense pressure was extremely taxing and energy-draining, so he had no choice but to go back and rest occasionally.

His spiritual space was now a sea of gold, and beneath it was the ancient bronze cauldron floating in front of the Divine Gate.

Long Chen found that the nourishment of the golden energy was causing a subtle change in the cauldron. It was as if that golden energy was able to affect it.

As more of that golden energy entered his spiritual space, Long Chen found that his Spiritual Strength was also undergoing a miraculous change.

However, he still didn't sense his Spiritual Strength getting stronger, nor did his spiritual space grow. He wasn't even able to tell what exactly was changing.

As for the state that allowed him to split his mind, it was truly mysterious. He couldn't explain it clearly; it was like he had stepped into an unknown domain.

After resting, Long Chen once more returned to the tenth step. This time, after the soul refinement, egg-like runes had appeared in his spiritual space.

Now, his blood, qi, bones, spirit, and soul had produced these runes, which signified that his soul refinement had reached its current limit.

"Long Chen!"

When Long Chen returned to the first step to rest, Zhu Yunwen, Yu Qingxuan, and the others had just passed through the gate and were delighted to see him.

Long Chen was shocked to see their incredibly sharp auras. Before this, they had been like embryonic blades. But having gone through the tempering of battle, they were displaying their light.

After all, the imperial disciples were all geniuses, but their combat experience was lacking, causing their combat power to be terrible.

However, through this trial of combat, their combat experience grew. This trial by fire was clearly created for them.

They now had powerful combat instincts and could no longer be considered rookies. Just from their sharp gazes, he could see the change in them. They had completely transformed.

The imperial family had intentionally not raised them in order to trick their enemies. However, the time had come for them to be unsheathed as divine blades, their skills honed and perfected to their utmost potential.

When Long Chen asked, he learned that they had charged to the seventh step of the previous level in one go. The devil experts that he had crippled were of little challenge to them, so it seemed that he had gone a bit too far. Anyway, their growth exceeded his expectations.

Most shocking of all was Zhu Yifeng's gaze. It was electric, akin to a volcano. Of everyone, his improvement was the quickest.

"Alright, let's go to the tenth step."

Long Chen rested and then brought them all the way to the tenth step of this level. With Long Chen's protection, the imperial disciples could go all-out, and there was no need for Long Chen to do anything.

They blasted through the devils like they were rotting wood. It was only when they actually reached the tenth step that their expressions changed.

They hadn't expected there to be such a powerful pressure here. However, with eight hundred thousand of them stepping forward at once, the pressure was distributed around them, so they were still able to resist.

On the other hand, Long Chen had been facing all of that pressure himself, while also splitting his mind in two. That was what made it so taxing for him to fight off the devil experts.

When they called upon their manifestations, the aura of the Vermilion Bird blazed to life, and divine flames soared with an intense brilliance. With unyielding determination, they unleashed their full power, holding nothing back in their display of strength and prowess.

With Long Chen here, they didn't need to worry about conserving their energy, so they went all-out. As they slaughtered their enemies, Long Chen noticed that the pressure here caused their manifestations to grow increasingly solid.

Moreover, their flame energy was growing along with their manifestations, causing their attacks to be sharp and fierce. With every moment, their power rose.

Seeing this, Long Chen felt incredibly envious. The Vermilion Bird Empire's foundation was truly astonishing. If they could pass this trial, these disciples alone would strike fear into the hearts of their enemy.

Clearly, the Vermilion Bird Empire's plan of acting weak was to bag something big. They would get rid of all their enemies once and for all.

Long Chen and the others fought on the tenth step for half a day. They were actually already exhausted, and Zhu Yunwen wanted to bring everyone back to rest, but Long Chen ordered everyone to keep fighting. He found that pushing them to their limit would cause them to draw out more and more of their potential at a shocking rate.

Fortunately, the imperial disciples were prideful, and under Long Chen's orders, they gritted their teeth and continued fighting. Despite there being numerous times where they thought that they wouldn't be able to hold on, seeing others were still enduring, they refused to give up.

As a result, they lasted several more hours than they had expected. During the fight, they quickly noticed that the pressure around them was weakening. The devil experts were also thinning out. In the end, they were all slain, and the pressure was gone.

The imperial disciples then sighed with relief, and the majority of them directly collapsed, having severely overdrafted themselves.

"Qingxuan, are you alright?" Long Chen looked at the pale Yu Qingxuan worriedly.

Yu Qingxuan was exhausted, but seeing Long Chen look at her, she smiled and said, "I'm fine. This trial has been very helpful to me. I was fully focused on alchemy before, but now I'm making up for my lack of focus on fighting. Hehe, if I had my current power in the three thousand worlds, none of you would have needed to worry about me."

Yu Qingxuan's strongest point was her alchemy. In the Blazing Heaven Divine Sect, she focused mostly on alchemy because she didn't like fighting, leaving her with a lack of experience in that regard.

However, in the Heavenly Flame World and the three thousand worlds, she came to know this world's cruelty. Powerful martial strength was a must. So, the feeling of her power rising greatly gave her a sense of safety.

Yu Qingxuan's killing power was undoubtedly the greatest here. Her core flame was the Heavenly Rainbow Flame, and her manifestation's Vermilion Bird was also different from everyone else's. However, she was still clearly unable to wield the full power of the Heavenly Rainbow Flame.

Her potential was terrifying, but her character was quiet and tranquil, as she hadn't activated her battle instincts. Now though, her potential was awakening.

When they had recovered to around seventy or eighty percent, Long Chen didn't give them any more time to rest. He directly brought them through the gate.

The first three levels were pressure, while the next three levels were actual combat. If Long Chen's guess was correct, the next three levels should be another kind of trial.

Long Chen didn't hesitate and stepped right through the gate. When he did, the space around him changed, and he found himself within a sea of flames.

"Wow!"

When Huo Linger saw this endless sea of flames, she cried out delightedly. She then ran out of the primal chaos space, staring at her surroundings in wonder.

Chapter 4009: A True Trial by Fire

The sea of fire was endless, filled with intense raging flames. If an ordinary person were to come here, it would definitely be hell on earth for them.

However, for flame cultivators, it was heaven. After Yu Qingxuan and the others came out of the gate, they let out cheers.

The Vermilion Bird Empire's disciples possessed very pure flame energy, a mark of the imperial family's lineage.

Thus, when they arrived here, there was no need for them to even do anything. Their manifestations automatically appeared to start absorbing the flames.

"Their manifestations can even be strengthened once more. The Vermilion Bird's inheritance is truly enviable." Long Chen couldn't help sighing inside when he saw Zhu Yunwen and the others' manifestations growing.

It was no wonder the Vermilion Bird Empire dared to make such a big play. They had the necessary power. However, they also made sure to keep things secret, or the other eight empires would never give them the time to grow through this trial.

"Finally, we can relax!"

They immersed themselves within the flames, their bodies feeling incomparably comfortable and relaxed. It was like they were warriors that had fought for many years and could finally lay down on their bed and sleep. That comfortable feeling couldn't be described with words.

However, that person had barely finished speaking when a flame arrow suddenly pierced his shoulder, causing all of their nerves to tense back up.

“What’s going on?!”

Startled cries rang out. They didn’t know what was going on as that flame arrow came out of nowhere. That person didn’t even know where he was shot from.

“AH!”

Suddenly, another scream rang out. A flame arrow pierced another person’s leg and then vanished back into the void. There was no way to track it.

Upon seeing this, everyone’s expression changed. These flame arrows were incomparably sharp, and their bodies couldn’t block them. Furthermore, they were silent and impossible to track.

Just as everyone was bewildered, Long Chen closed his eyes and spread his divine sense. He noticed that his divine sense was suppressed to a range of just a few meters in this space.

With his divine sense spread, Long Chen could ‘see’ that it was like he was surrounded by water. The flame fluctuations were like flowing water: waves layering on top of each other, waves crashing against each other, and waves building on top of each other.

Suddenly, Long Chen’s hand snapped out.

The void quivered and a three-foot-long flame arrow was caught in his grasp.

Seeing this, everyone let out startled cries. Long Chen had actually caught the flame arrow. However, just as he caught it, it dissipated like gas, vanishing without a trace.

“Brother Long, how did you do that?” asked Zhu Yunwen.

“I spread my divine sense and managed to grasp some clues,” said Long Chen.

“Spreading divine sense? What? Why can’t I spread my divine sense?” asked Zhu Yunwen. He turned to Yu Qingxuan. “Qingxuan, can you do it?”

“I can only spread it seven meters before it’s suppressed,” said Yu Qingxuan.

Everyone was startled by this. “Then why can’t we do it at all?”

Just then, another person was struck by an arrow. As a result, all the disciples quivered fearfully. No matter how strong they were, invisible attacks were still frightening.

Yu Qingxuan also didn’t know why she could and they couldn’t. She then looked at Long Chen. Long Chen thought about it and said, “Perhaps it is because the two of us are alchemists. Our spiritual perception is a bit stronger than others. But that isn’t the crux of the problem. This trial must have its own goal. The first to third levels tempered your physical bodies and bloodlines. The fourth to sixth levels raised your combat experience and fighting skills. This seventh level must be tempering some kind of energy. Furthermore, this energy must be something that everyone has. Don’t panic. This first step definitely gives some buffer room. It won’t be fatal. You all saw that the arrows weren’t striking anywhere fatal. So, there’s no need to worry about your head suddenly being pierced just yet.”

Hearing that, everyone relaxed quite a bit. Just as Long Chen said, if those arrows avoided their vital parts, there was not that much to be afraid of.

They couldn't help being ashamed of themselves. Despite both being in the Immortal King realm, even ignoring their actual power, just this judgment and reaction speed was something that they couldn't keep up with.

What they particularly admired about Long Chen was that no matter what the environment or circumstance was, he could always maintain his cool and confidence.

Long Chen continued, "Originally, this trial included a mental component, one that tested the mettle of your heart, your ability to notice things, as well as your ability to control your fear of the unknown. I shouldn't have said anything in that case, but time is too pressing, so I will give everyone a reminder. This is a place of flame energy, so the power it is testing must be related to flames. Perhaps try drawing in the flame energy through your manifestation or your core flame. See if you can merge with these flames to see through its essence. However, I don't know if the trial is to block the arrows or to dodge them. We'll have to figure it out ourselves."

Zhu Yunwen and the others slapped their legs. Of course. Within the sea of fire, the trial definitely had something to do with flames. They had actually been too afraid of these unknown arrows to even think of this simple principle.

Hence, they cursed themselves for being fools. They all thought themselves smart during normal times, but now they were like fools. Their heads were so slow.

With Long Chen's reminder, they began to circulate their flame energy, using the fluctuations of their manifestation and core flame to sense the surrounding flames.

An imperial disciple suddenly dodged to the side but was still struck through the shoulder by flames. However, he still cried out in delight.

"I saw it! I saw it! I could sense the surrounding fluctuations with my core flame!"

POW!

Suddenly, Zhu Yifeng's fist struck an arrow just as it appeared, causing him to feel ecstatic.

"Success! So that's how it works!"

After finding out the crux of the trial, the imperial disciples were delighted. They felt even more admiration for Long Chen. Everything became simple in front of him.

Long Chen nodded. "This is a test of spiritual perception and reaction. It is the most important thing on the battlefield, something that all top experts must possess. It is what allows you to instinctively find the best move in the middle of danger, like a chaotic battle. Within a chaotic battle, all the techniques, strategies, the martial patterns that you've learned, they're all nonsense. Battle instincts are the most important thing. As long as your spiritual perception is strong enough, even if your head doesn't react fast enough, your body will automatically make the most correct decision. If you can pass this part, you will be reborn as true warriors. Your combat power will no longer lag behind."

Upon hearing that, everyone's blood heated up. Previously, Long Chen had said that they were unable to draw out their full power in combat, that they were at most unleashing ten to twenty percent of their power.

On that day, Long Chen had managed to capture Weng Tianyao and beat back a three-flower Divine Venerate. However, that hadn't been the result of some overwhelming power. He had done it easily and simply.

That was a display of his combat experience. With Long Chen's encouragement, even Zhu Yunwen, Yu Qianxue, and the others felt their blood heating up.

"Let's go to the next step!"

Long Chen then waved his hand, leading everyone forward.

Chapter 4010: The Ninth Level

When they reached the next step, more invisible arrows appeared. But although they were sharp, they still weren't fatal as they didn't strike people in their vital parts.

However, with the arrows being more concentrated, everyone was under more pressure. The arrows also came silently, making it difficult to sense them.

After all, spiritual perception was not something easy to develop. It could only be accumulated by bloody effort, from brushing against death countless times.

Although this trial was specially made for the Vermilion Bird Empire's imperial disciples, making it extremely effective, it was still very difficult to dodge all the arrows. In other words, they needed time to get used to it.

"Long Chen, you can train your will here," said the dragon expert.

"How do I train it?" asked Long Chen.

"The Dragon Soul Body Forging Art is my self-created technique, so there are many principles within it that are different from your human race. The method is also different. I said that you needed to cultivate seven kinds of power: the blood, qi, bones, spirit, soul, will, and mind. You didn't understand what these energies were, and there's no way for me to properly explain them. For example, the blood, qi, and bones are part of the body, but in the dragon race, there are two additional attributes: the dragon tendons and dragon horns. Your human race has no such thing. Your own tendons are a different concept from dragon tendons, let alone the dragon horns," said the dragon expert.

"Then what about my meridians and teeth? Can they be replacements?" asked Long Chen.

"It is impossible. Also, take note that the true dragon race's teeth are used for eating, not attacking. It is one difference between us and other dragon races. As for your human race's meridians, their strength cannot compare to the dragon race's meridians. Even if a true dragon fights to the death, their dragon bones might shatter, but their dragon tendons will be intact. Don't have crazy thoughts, alright? I adapted the Dragon Soul Body Forging Art to you through countless calculations, and only then did I

make the determination to give it to you. So, don't think yourself smart and start adding random things. Otherwise, you'll end up killing yourself with nowhere to cry," warned the dragon expert sternly.

Long Chen obediently nodded. This wasn't something that he dared to play around with.

"This so-called will is a power that transcends the physical body according to our dragon race's explanations. However, we are also unable to say what exactly it is. It is something between your human race's divine sense and mental energy. It is incorporeal but can also be tangible. When your divine sense spreads, it is incorporeal but is capable of sensing the flame fluctuations. As a result, you can sense the direction of the attack the moment the arrow condenses, and thus dodge or block it. But it is also tangible by layering it on top of your senses. Without using any other power, you can use it to block the arrows, change their orientation, or force them to follow your will," said the dragon expert.

"Use just my will to block attacks? That... that's impossible, no?" Long Chen was shocked. He had never come into contact with that kind of power before. It had exceeded the scope of his understanding.

"How is it impossible? Sword cultivators attacking with their swords, alchemists controlling the fire, talisman cultivators using runic arts, spirit cultivators controlling spirits—they all use this kind of power."

"But they all add something additional like their spiritual seals on top of it. Also, ignoring whether or not I can place a spiritual seal on these flame arrows, they form so quickly that I have no time to even put one on them," said Long Chen, feeling that this was impossible.

"Don't waste time. You thought that you couldn't split your mind, but you still did it, right? Some things can't be explained with just words, so just listen to me. Act. If I say that you can do it, then you can do it. If I have such confidence, why don't you?"

"I..."

Long Chen was speechless. He didn't even understand what it was saying, but it wanted him to try. Wasn't this playing with his life?

However, he had no other choice, so he summoned his courage and tried it. Long Chen's divine sense was like air yet also like water. Through it, he sensed the surrounding fluctuations. It was very simple for him to sense any attacks, their direction, and their strength.

Even so, this water and air could only be passively controlled, and there was no way to condense them into a barrier. Furthermore, Long Chen had never even come into contact with such a force before. He was groping around like a blind man.

Most importantly, the dragon expert's explanation was also very vague, not giving Long Chen any direction at all. He didn't even know if he even had such a power.

However, even if he didn't understand, he had to try. There was no way back for him now.

But then, he felt so lost that he had no idea what he was doing. It was a difficult feeling.

At this moment, Yu Qingxuan and the others were diligently training on the first step, making rapid progress. Zhu Yifeng, Zhu Yunwen, Yu Qianxue, and the others had honed their abilities to sense a remarkable eighty percent of the attacks, gracefully dodging between twenty to thirty percent of them.

Considering that they hadn't even been able to sense anything before, they were actually improving at an astonishing rate.

Thus, Long Chen bid them farewell and continued onward. Arriving at the fifth step, he was about to stop there when the dragon expert urged him on.

"Keep going."

So, Long Chen helplessly continued on. The further he went, the more arrows appeared. With every step, two or three arrows would shoot at him.

Long Chen could sense them and also dodge and block them. But he also knew that this meant nothing. After all, his cultivation method was different from Yu Qingxuan and the others.

When he reached the tenth step, he was attacked by a dozen arrows every time he walked forward. To make things worse, they all shot at him from different angles.

"Keep going. Go to the ninth level," said the dragon expert before Long Chen could even take a breather.

Thus, Long Chen passed through the gate, arriving at the eighth level. To his surprise, the number of arrows dropped here, and he only encountered one every several steps.

However, their power had intensified to the extent that even Long Chen's physical body was pierced by them. So, as he continued onward, wounds gradually appeared on his body. Those arrows were originally only able to pierce his skin, but by the seventh step of the eighth level, they were able to penetrate half an inch into his flesh.

As expected, when he reached the tenth step, the arrows were even more terrifying. Now, these invisible arrows possessed the power to shoot straight through his body.

Long Chen was about to train here, but the dragon expert directly urged him to enter the next level, causing Long Chen to feel an icy chill run through his body. He was then about to summon the Dragon Blood Battle Armor, but the dragon expert sternly stopped him.

As Long Chen advanced to the ninth level, a fierce Sword Qi suddenly lunged toward his head, instilling a chilling sensation of imminent death that sent his nerves into a state of high alert.

Reacting swiftly, Long Chen instinctively thrust his palm toward the incoming Sword Qi, meeting the attack head-on. A spray of blood then followed as the Sword Qi pierced through his palm, prompting a visible change in his expression