

Prodigies 391

Chapter 391 Body Felt Hollowed

Perfect results!

The legendary phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky!

When the rune masters heard the result from Linghu Xiu, they all fell into stunned silence like they had just seen a ghost.

This is too unbelievable. I thought that Lin Xun would miserably fail the first level, destroy his reputation, and be humiliated by the Chu Family.

How could this be the result?

The atmosphere was deathly still and terrifyingly silent.

A smile froze on Chu Haidong's lips. His eyes were wide with shocked disbelief, and his entire body had stiffened like a lightning had struck him.

The result indeed shocked him like a lightning bolt.

How...how could this be?

He roared like a beast in his heart, unable to accept the truth.

"This...this isn't true, right?" Chu Yunkong cried out in a trembling voice, and his expression was morphing indefinitely like he was refusing to give up.

He was planning how to get revenge on Lin Xun but who would have thought that such a dramatic reversal would happen?

Linghu Xiu's face instantly darkened, and he said in a voice full of displeasure, "How can the spectacle of Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky be fake? If you don't agree with the result, why don't you go onto the stage and take the assessment? I will immediately apologize to you if you can produce Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky!"

Chu Yunkong trembled and started to panic. He finally believed that everything was true!

The atmosphere grew increasingly deathly still in the hall, and everyone's gazes turned strange as they looked at the clansmen of the Chu Clan.

They had been clamoring that Lin Xun would never pass the tests of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate and humiliated the youth in many different ways. The spectacle of Golden Clouds Soar into the Sky was like a silent slap to their faces!

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In the other hall, the atmosphere was just as strange.

The group of authority figures were utterly silent with different thoughts in their minds. But their faces were all red with embarrassment as they realized they had misjudged Lin Xun earlier. They had truly thought that he was too arrogant and was biting off more than he could chew.

They had even claimed that Lin Xun would destroy Mind Cleansing Peak because of his arrogance!

However—

Everything had been reversed!

The reversal was too earthshaking. Who would have imagined that Lin Xun, an initiate rune master, was able to produce the legendary phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky?

If they thought that Chu Haidong had achieved an amazing feat by creating a brand new record, the phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky was superior in every aspect!

“This...” someone suddenly said aloud, but he didn’t know what to say after that.

“Everyone has misjudged the kid. After living for so many years, I didn’t think I would be slapped in the face by a kid,” Yu Beidou laughed at himself.

“Yu Beidou, I can give you Chu Haidong but Lin Xun belongs to our Divine Workshop!” Cheng Jing said resolutely.

“You wish!”

Unexpectedly, Yu Beidou’s expression dramatically changed as he sprang up. “Why would I just give away such an extraordinary talent?”

“If that’s the case, then we’ll have to rely on our own means. But I can promise you that our Divine Workshop will pay any price to get Lin Xun!”

Cheng Jing’s face bore a determined look.

A quarrel again broke out between the two. The other big shots looked at each other in dismay and smiled bitterly.

Shen Tuo suddenly said aloud, “You two, our Qinglu Academy previously didn’t compete with you for Chu Haidong, but we will not let a remarkable talent like Lin Xun go.”

Everyone was stunned, envious, and jealous, but they couldn’t do anything.

They also wanted to recruit Lin Xun, but they knew that they didn’t stand a chance against the three great behemoths—the Rune Master Association, Divine Workshop and the Qinglu Academy!

How would they dare to intervene seeing that Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing and Shen Tuo were determined to recruit Lin Xun?

“Elders, this is just the first test. Aren’t you all too hasty?” Feng Qingyou couldn’t help but remind them.

Immediately, Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing and Shen Tuo exchanged looks with each other like they had been slapped awake. They had decided to wait and see.

Feng Qingyou felt strange. When she had passed the tests of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate, she had also received the same treatment but it was nowhere near as intense.

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“Haidong, what to do?” Chu Yunkong cried out in panic.

Chu Haidong drew a deep breath and uttered through gritted teeth. “It’s still early! It’s just the first level, what are you afraid of? No matter how good Lin Xun is, he can’t possibly pass all the tests!”

“Yes!” Chu Yunkong’s spirits were instantly lifted. “So what if he produced the phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar into the Sky? There are still eight tablets! He might still fail miserably, right?”

Having said that, Chu Haidong and Chu Yunkong both felt a little uncertain. After all, the phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky was too astonishing!

After the initial shock, the rune masters in the hall regained their composure and turned to the Dragon Gate Stage again.

Lin Xun was taking the test of the second tablet, unaware that his amazing performance had caused a huge storm outside of the Dragon Gate Stage.

The test in the second stone tablet was the same as the first, only that the rune vision was much more complicated and obscure.

However, that didn’t stop Lin Xun.

He sank into a state of isolation from the world. His body, mind and spirit were all intensely focused on the mysterious world of runes.

For him, the comprehension and control of rune patterns were a kind of enjoyment. He felt wonderful like a fish in water.

Compared to the first level, he effortlessly grasped and took control of all the rune visions in the second tablet and integrated them into a complicated rune array!

At the same time, a wave of golden light erupted from the second tablet under astonished gazes!

Dazzling golden clouds blanketed the second ancient stone tablet!

A shocked silence descended on the audience. At the first tablet, Lin Xun produced the phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the sky at around the ten minute mark.

However, it took Lin Xun less than half of that time to grasp the rune vision in the second stone tablet, which should have been significantly harder than the first!

Many people were utterly shaken and unable to calm themselves.

On the other hand, the faces of Chu Haidong, Chu Yunkong, and other members of the Chu Clan were so overcast that they resembled gloomy clouds in the sky.

In the other hall, the group of authority figures had already risen to their feet, and they couldn’t conceal the excitement on their faces.

It was another Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky!

They had experienced the legendary phenomenon once again!

It might have been a fluke the first time but it couldn't be pure luck the second time!

However, they had shown their astonishment too soon.

As though a divine being had possessed Lin Xun, he successfully passed the tests in the stone tablets one after another, and each time it was quicker than the previous!

It was too abnormal!

In the past, any rune masters who participated in the rune grandmaster assessment found each level of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate more difficult than the previous.

However, Lin Xun passed the tests faster as he progressed the levels. It was too unbelievable!

Of course, everyone was most astonished by the fact that Lin Xun produced the phenomenon Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky every single time!

There was no exception!

The rune masters in the hall were about to go crazy from the shock. Their hearts couldn't take it anymore. Who would have imagined that Lin Xun had such terrifying mastery in the art of the runes?

He had not only created a miracle, but also created history!

The Rune Master Association headquarters would no doubt record Lin Xun's achievement into the history books of the empire, and it would be passed down through the ages!

After all, there had never been a rune master with unbelievably astonishing rune skills at such a young age!

In the other hall, Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, Shen Tuo and other authority figures were breathing rapidly, quivering, and were wild with excitement.

Too abnormal!

Lin Xun is a monster!

They were already frantically calculating how high of a price they should pay to recruit Lin Xun.

"He..."

Feng Qingyou's pure and beautiful face brimmed with astonishment, and her bright eyes lit up. She no longer looked bored.

She was utterly shocked, or perhaps even frightened.

In the past, she had been acknowledged as the leading figure of the younger generation in the art of runes, and no one in the empire could be compared with her.

However, a young man more dazzling than her who had superior rune skills than she did had suddenly emerged.

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The ninth stone tablet!

The stone tablet was known as the Heaven Barrier.

Before everyone recovered from the shock, Lin Xun had passed the assessment without any obstruction!

When they saw golden clouds and lights drown the ninth stone tablet like a tidal wave, all the rune masters in the hall couldn't help but exclaim like a rumble of thunder!

He passed!

Lin Xun passed the tests of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate in one attempt with unparalleled speed!

The most terrifying thing was that he had produced the spectacle of Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky on all nine tablets!

Everything felt like an unprecedented miracle happening before them.

No one dared to say that Lin Xun wasn't a true rune grandmaster as they would draw endless mocking and contempt to themselves.

Thud!

Chu Haidong slumped in his chair; his eyes were lifeless, and his soul seemed to have left his body.

Lin Xun's perfect and earthshaking assessment result felt like a giant hammer about to smash his heart!

Chu Haidong felt everything darken before him, and his body felt hollowed within.

Chapter 392 The Cries of the Nine Dragons

"You two, are you going to tear into each other's faces?"

"Hmph, stop talking nonsense, our Divine Workshop must have Lin Xun. Let alone tear into someone else's face, I wouldn't hesitate to do something more extreme to recruit him!"

"I believe that our president will support me at all costs if he knows about Lin Xun's remarkable ability. You two can try to see if our Qinglu Academy will give up!"

"You two—have gone too far!"

Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing and Shen Tuo were red to the tip of their ears. No one was willing to step back.

The other authority figures remained silent with complicated thoughts swirling in their heads.

They had lost the mood to watch the other's quarrel. If possible, they also wouldn't hesitate to fight for Lin Xun. They wouldn't have any regrets even if they broke their heads during it!

After all, Lin Xun had passed the assessment and produced the spectacle of Golden Clouds Soar to the sky from all nine stone tablets. A dazzling rune grandmaster such as Lin Xun was worth fighting for.

Regrettably...

They had no qualification to fight over Lin Xun when compared to Yu Beidou and the others!

This tormented them all.

Feng Qingyou stood there alone in a daze, her mind swaying.

The result of the verification assessment had been released, and Lin Xun had been proven to be an unparalleled genius in the art of runes!

She couldn't be compared to him!

Feng Qingyou, who had passed the tests of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate at the young age of seventeen, was the youngest rune grandmaster in the empire, and her name had shaken the world.

However, Lin Xun had passed the assessment at the age of sixteen and achieved perfect results every single time!

He didn't only create a miracle but also created history!

For the first time, Feng Qingyou understood the saying that there was always someone stronger than you. If she hadn't coincidentally come to the Rune Master Association headquarters, she wouldn't have believed it.

"What kind of monster is that guy?"

Feng Qingyou couldn't help but look at the light screen again.

After passing the assessment, Lin Xun was still sitting cross-legged on the Dragon Gate Stage, motionless like a rock!

It was just that...

Feng Qingyou narrowed her bright eyes, and she couldn't help but say out loud, "Elders, this...this is not over yet!"

Her words took Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing and Shen Tuo aback. When they noticed Lin Xun's unusual behavior, they were all puzzled. What is that kid doing now?

"Hey, something is wrong, the verification assessment has ended, but why is Lin Xun still sitting so still?"

A commotion broke out from the group of rune masters before the Dragon Gate Stage.

"Could that guy have had an accident?" a member of the Chu Clan maliciously speculated.

"Heaven is jealous of talented geniuses. Maybe his performance was so showy that it had some unwanted effect."

"That must be it. Otherwise, why hasn't he got off the Dragon Gate Stage?"

The other clansmen of the Chu Clan also spoke out.

Chu Haidong finally awakened from his slumped and dumbfounded state, and his eyes gleamed in anticipation.

It would be great if something unexpected happened to Lin Xun!

Regardless, all gazes gathered on Lin Xun once again as they were puzzled about what he was doing.

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The assessment has ended?

No!

At least, it wasn't over yet for Lin Xun.

Lin Xun had learned an obscure and complicated rune array from the rune vision in each of the nine ancient stone tablets.

Each one was a rare, large-scale rune array.

However, Lin Xun believed they were incomplete. He somehow felt that the integration of the nine rune arrays was perhaps the biggest secret within the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate!

Therefore, he continued to sit as still as a rock on the Dragon Gate Stage.

In his mind-sea, mighty power was being circulated and evolving into several complicated rune arrays.

They were like nine mysterious ancient diagrams being presented in his mind, forming a vast and complex rune vision.

Soon, Lin Xun grew exhausted. It's too complicated. The wonderful meanings contained in the nine divine rune arrays are as vast as a sea of smoke. It's more difficult to perfectly combine them than ascending to the sky!

But he never gave up. He couldn't tolerate giving up halfway.

"It's impossible to integrate static rune arrays!"

It was unknown how long it took but a flash of realization suddenly struck Lin Xun. "If I can make these rune arrays move and operate, will there be a chance of integrating them?"

For example, the runes of the Flowing Light Runes are always changing. If I can learn from their changes, maybe I can combine these nine rune arrays into one.

With this thought, Lin Xun didn't hesitate to start!

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Time flew by, and an hour quickly passed.

Lin Xun was still as motionless as a statue.

Everyone grew increasingly perplexed about what Lin Xun was doing.

The longer time passed, the more it indicated that something was happening to Lin Xun. The clan members of the Chu Clan were full of anticipation for Lin Xun to encounter an accident and be killed right away!

Especially Chu Haidong. He felt that if Lin Xun was alive, he would never be able to lift his head again and would have to live in his shadow for the rest of his life.

Time continued to pass. Even the authority figures such as Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing and Shen Tuo noticed that something was wrong and started to worry.

Lin Xun was a rare peerless genius in the art of runes. It would be a tremendous loss if something were to happen to him!

"Everyone, do you remember a rumor circulating in the empire a thousand years ago?" Shen Tuo suddenly exclaimed like he remembered something.

"What rumor?" the others asked in puzzlement.

"It is rumored that there is an unsolved secret within the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate. Whoever solves it will evoke the cries of the nine dragons and make them echo throughout the world!" Shen Tuo explained.

The cries of the nine dragons!

All of the authority figures' minds shook as they finally remembered such a rumor had indeed been circulating in the empire. However, it was too absurd and bizarre that it had never been proven, and the rumor soon subsided.

However, when Shen Tuo mentioned it again, they realized that Lin Xun could be attempting to solve the secret of the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate.

"It's obviously not true. The assessment has already ended. How would such...such an unbelievable thing happen?"

"Yes, the so-called cries of the nine dragons are too absurd. Since ancient times, I have never heard of it happening."

Shen Tuo couldn't help but say, "An unsolved secret can't possibly happen..."

However, before he finished his sentence, a forceful, ancient, and sonorous voice reverberated throughout the Dragon Gate Stage!

Everyone's hearts started to quiver as they felt indescribable pressure shrouding them and compelling them to feel awe.

The voice was so ancient and majestic that it sounded like a heavenly decree echoing throughout the world!

Members of the Chu Clan as well as the other rune masters were trembling all over as the terrifying pressure shrouded their bodies and minds.

Weaker rune masters collapsed on the ground, ashen-faced and frightened!

Rumble—

At the same time, a dragon cry stirred the Dragon Gate Stage and caused a shower of golden light beams to shoot out from the nine stone tablets, bathing Lin Xun in a dreamy golden glow. His figure couldn't be seen anymore.

The mysterious scene was so bizarre as if an ancient phenomenon was happening. The entire audience was plunged into shock.

"This..."

"When has such a phenomenon ever appeared since ancient times?"

"Could it be...the rumored...dragon cry?"

Someone lit up with excitement.

But no one could explain why such a mysterious phenomenon had suddenly happened to Lin Xun, and what bizarre situation he was experiencing.

Before long, another dragon cry rang out, again grand, majestic and imposing!

The rumbling and vibrations of the voice set off frantic waves of golden light from the Dragon Gate Stage.

This was no doubt a day that everyone would never forget in their life!

Dragon cries continued to ring across the world as if a dragon god had descended upon the world from ancient times.

As for Lin Xun, the surging golden light had completely drowned his body. Even the Dragon Gate Stage had been transformed into a dreamy and magnificent land.

"The cries of the nine dragons! The rumors are true!" Shen Tuo couldn't contain his excitement.

"Doesn't this mean that Lin Xun has solved the secret within the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate?"

"It must be so! After all, this has never happened before!"

"Golden Clouds Soar to the Sky, the cries of the nine dragons...These ancient and mysterious phenomena all appeared today...who would have thought?"

"Is this Lin Xun blessed by the rune gods?!"

The authority figures cried out one after another, unable to control their excitement. Everyone's eyes were wide with disbelief as they couldn't remove themselves from the state of astonishment.

Feng Qingyou pursed her cherry-red lips and muttered, "Abnormal...so abnormal...too abnormal...heavens, you're too unfair!"

Thud!

In the main hall, Chu Haidong's body went stiff, and in the end, he couldn't help but cough up a mouthful of blood!

Although he didn't understand what the cry of the nine dragons was, he knew that Lin Xun had encountered a great opportunity!

How could Chu Haidong accept that?

Having suffered repeated blows, Chu Haidong violently coughed up blood, tottered and almost fainted.

"Haidong!"

The members of the Chu Clan rushed forward in a panic to support him.

Chapter 393 Fighting Over Him

The cries of a dragon rose from the Rune Master Association Headquarters and spread in all directions.

The sound soared into the sky, scattering the clouds.

It flew past the streets, causing the pedestrians' bodies to turn rigid and stop what they were doing. For a brief moment, the originally bustling scene turned deathly still and silent.

The birds and beasts in the city wailed in misery as they lay on the ground and trembled.

The boundless ancient dragon cries swept across the territories of the city's great factions, alerting the many terrifying presences within.

"What powerful pressure!"

"Sound that shakes the land. It must be some kind of sign. Could something big have happened in the Forbidden City?"

"It's from the Rune Master Association Headquarters!"

"Send someone to find out what happened."

The terrifying presences conversed in different zones of the Forbidden City, feeling shocked and bewildered.

The royal palace, the seventy-two aristocratic peaks, Qinglu Academy, the imperial army...and other locations with powerful hidden experts also sensed the disturbance.

For a time, the draconic roar made the entire Forbidden City fall into an uproar and caused huge ripples!

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Lin Xun remained unaware of all this because he was busy receiving a giant ancient inheritance in his mind!

The inheritance was far too vast and gleamed with divine golden light. It rumbled as it surged about before ultimately converging into a single ancient word: 'tribulation!'

The word looked as if it had been built from the very essence of the dao itself, shining brilliantly as it gave off a terrifying, ancient draconic pressure.

It was the secret Lin Xun had unexpectedly obtained: a mysterious inheritance called the Tribulation Dragon Nine Transformations!

The mysterious word that shone in Lin Xun's mind was the inheritance power created from the fusion of the nine complex rune arrays!

Even Lin Xun himself never imagined that he would obtain such an inheritance after completing the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate test.

Could this be the greatest secret hidden in the Nine Tablets of the Dragon Gate?

Lin Xun could not come to a definite conclusion despite mulling over it for a long time.

All of a sudden, an unrestrainable sensation of exhaustion began to fill him. Lin Xun realized that he had used up too much mental energy and was beginning to reach his limit.

He did not dare to continue. With a deep breath, he opened his eyes and stood up from the Dragon Gate Stage.

Eh?

When he looked around, Lin Xun was shocked to discover that the atmosphere was so deathly silent that even a pin drop could be heard.

The rune masters in the hall had dumbstruck expressions mixed with various emotions such as shock, confusion, horror, fear...

No one was speaking!

It was as if they had turned into statues, and it was a very bizarre sight to behold.

Lin Xun could not help but frown. He looked at the Chu Clan members and found that they had ugly, despairing expressions.

Chu Haidong in particular had a deathly pale complexion as if all the life had been sucked out of him.

Chu Yunkong was no better. His wrinkly old face was disappointed and bitter as if his parents had died.

In the end, Lin Xun looked toward Linghu Xiu and probed, "Elder, I should have passed the exam, right?"

Linghu Xiu was immediately awakened from his stupor and hastily nodded. "Oh, yeah, ah? You've...awakened?"

His eyes widened as he stared at Lin Xun in astonishment.

Lin Xun: "....."

What did he mean by 'awakened?'

He was unaware of the huge shock the nine dragon cries had caused. Linghu Xiu was, of course, no exception to this and had just returned to his senses.

With a deep breath, Linghu Xiu said with a complicated expression, "Lin Xun...there's no doubt. You're already a true-blue rune grandmaster. Moreover...moreover you are the most special one yet."

His voice contained the same mixed feelings as his expression.

It was as if he was still in disbelief that such a miraculous thing would occur in a young initiate rune master.

“Thanks for enlightening me, Elder.”

Lin Xun smiled. From Linghu Xiu’s words, Lin Xun was finally certain that he was indeed the only one to have obtained the Tribulation Dragon Nine Transformations inheritance!

A slight wave of dizziness soon struck him, informing him that he had used up too much energy and needed a rest.

He took a deep breath and walked down from the Dragon Gate Stage.

“Young Master Lin Xun, I am an advanced rune master from Luojin Workshop, and I have a few questions about runes which I wish to seek your guidance on. Will you be able to spare some time to help me?”

“Young Master Lin Xun, I am an advanced rune master...”

“.....”

Before he could get off, he was quickly surrounded by rune masters whose faces were filled with adoration.

There was even an old man who excitedly shouted, “Young Master Lin Xun, your unrivaled methods have completely entranced me. I beg you to take me as your disciple!”

As rune masters who had dedicated their lives to the path, who could resist after witnessing Lin Xun’s godly techniques?

All of them had countless questions for Lin Xun and strongly desired his advice.

Lin Xun was no longer a young teenager in their hearts, and instead was a peerless miracle worker and a rune grandmaster who was beyond comparison!

What was a rune grandmaster?

It was a superior existence that had attained unmatched mastery of runes!

“Apologies everyone, I’m quite tired and wish to rest.”

Lin Xun was only stunned for a moment and quickly returned to his senses.

Although he knew that everyone’s opinions would change after he passed the exam, he had not expected that these veteran rune masters would become so fanatical.

“Hmph! How can rune masters display such behavior?”

A stern voice thundered, causing the crowd to turn around. They soon saw Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, Shen Tuo, and other bigwigs approaching from a distance.

Hiss~

The rune masters gasped, shocked that even these rarely seen bigwigs would be alerted and appear!

They immediately shut their mouths, not daring to speak another word.

However, they were even more astonished when they saw the always cold and stern Yu Beidou reveal a bright and friendly smile as he quickly walked toward Lin Xun and said, "Lin Xun, I saw your earlier performance, and I have to say that it was breathtaking. Are you interested in taking up a position in the Rune Master Association Headquarters?"

The crowds' expressions turned strange. Was this really the Grandmaster Yu Beidou they knew? Who had ever seen him show such a friendly smile?

"Lin Xun, don't listen to him. I am Cheng Jing from the Divine Workshop. If you come to our workshop, I promise to fulfill any requests that are within our means!"

Cheng Jing also stepped forward. His eyes seemed to burn as they locked onto Lin Xun as if he was a priceless treasure.

The crowd could not help but be shaken once more. Grandmaster Cheng Jing was famously known for his strictness, but now, he was actually promising such generous terms in order to recruit Lin Xun. This was too unusual!

However, it wasn't over yet. The rune masters were soon utterly stupefied to see Qinglu Academy's Grandmaster Shen Tuo also step forward and declare that anything was up for discussion as long as Lin Xun joined Qinglu Academy.

This was just crazy!

Rune Master Association Headquarters, Divine Workshop, Qinglu Academy...any rune master would be ecstatic to receive such attention from any one of these titans.

And yet, all three of these highly prestigious factions were already fighting over Lin Xun before he could get a word in, and each was promising him more generous terms than the next. How could the rune masters present not be shocked by this?

"Ahem, ahem, Lin Xun, if you're willing to join..."

One of the bigwigs suddenly coughed, clearly intending to join in.

Before he could finish his sentence, however, Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, and Shen Tuo cut in with hostile expressions, "You're overstepping!"

The bigwig had no choice but to withdraw.

The crowd looked at each other, finally realizing that Lin Xun's earlier performance had made Yu Beidou and the other two serious about getting him no matter the cost!

Lin Xun was likely the only person to ever enjoy such special treatment...

The rune masters present sighed. They couldn't even bring themselves to feel jealous. Lin Xun's earlier performance had been too spectacular, and they could not help but feel only admiration toward him.

He was the real deal!

To be honest, even Lin Xun himself was shocked by this.

Soon after, he revealed a tired look and smiled bitterly. "Thank you, elders, for showing me so much love. However, this is an important matter, and I am currently exhausted and need rest. How about we discuss this another day?"

Yu Beidou slapped his forehead and embarrassedly said, "It's all my fault, how could I forget that you must be exhausted after that ordeal. How about this, rest here while I send someone to retrieve some recovery medicine from our storage? I guarantee that you will recover in no time!"

Cheng Jing smiled faintly and said, "The Divine Workshop has the best pills in the empire. Lin Xun, come with me and I promise you will not only recover but also obtain unimaginable benefits!"

Shen Tuo confidently declared, "Heh, there's no one who doesn't know that Qinglu Academy's Divine Rejuvenation Pool has unbelievable recovery properties. Lin Xun, you don't even need to agree to join Qinglu Academy right now. Come with me to experience the pool's powers first before you decide."

The nearby rune masters' hearts thumped loudly as their breathing grew heavy. Which rune master would be able to enjoy such special treatment in the empire?

Lin Xun felt a little overwhelmed by their generous hospitality.

In the end, he rejected their invitations and firmly stated that he did not wish to trouble everyone and would return to Mind Cleansing Peak first.

"Heh, he's clearly planning to wait for the best offer. Since he has the initiative, he can always bargain for a better deal."

In the distance, Feng Qingyou could not help but chuckle as she watched. She had already seen through Lin Xun's intentions.

Chapter 394 Killing Many Birds with One Stone

Although Yu Beidou's, Cheng Jing's, and Shen Tuo's generous invitations were ultimately rejected by Lin Xun, they were not the slightest bit angered to the crowd's surprise.

The three of them knew that it was impossible to recruit talent like Lin Xun with mere verbal promises.

At the same time, they also needed to properly discuss this issue with their respective factions to decide on a strategy to recruit him.

A magnificent scene occurred when Lin Xun left.

The empire's leading rune masters personally accompanied Lin Xun onto his carriage and sent him off with bright smiles.

The grand treatment stupefied the watching rune masters as they inwardly sighed in admiration.

With all eyes on Lin Xun, no one noticed the agonized and dispirited looks on the Chu Clan members.

Chu Haidong could no longer take it. He coughed blood as his eyes rolled over, and he fainted.

He was carried away by the other Chu Clan members as they dejectedly left the Rune Master Association Headquarters.

Chu Haidong was honestly really unlucky. A brilliant younger generation rune grandmaster like him should have received much attention and praise.

Unfortunately, he had encountered Lin Xun. No matter how amazing of a record Chu Haidong created, it was just far too unremarkable compared to Lin Xun's.

This was one of the pitfalls of comparing to others.

Chu Haidong was actually not a petty person. Had this been any other scenario, he would have never fainted out of anger.

However, he had some disagreements with Lin Xun and subsequently declared that he would use the Dragon Gate Nine Tablets test results to prove who was the ignorant fool between them.

The results were out and Lin Xun had become the biggest winner that received the bigwigs' attention while Chu Haidong...had become the fool!

How could he possibly bear this?

When the people discussed these events in the future, it would be unavoidable for them to mention the disagreements between him and Lin Xun, and they would naturally know who was the 'fool'!

Hence, Chu Haidong ultimately coughed blood and fainted...

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Not long after Lin Xun left, groups of cultivators began arriving at the Rune Master Association HQ to find out what had happened.

They were sent by the various great factions in the Forbidden City.

Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, Zhen Tuo, and the other bigwigs immediately realized that the disturbance had been too great and the entire city had been alerted!

They did not dare to linger any longer and quickly scattered so they could begin brainstorming a strategy to recruit Lin Xun as soon as possible.

Linghu Xiu was the only one who did not leave.

With a complicated expression and a heavy heart, he turned around and began heading toward a certain private room in the Rune Master Association HQ.

Someone was already waiting inside. It was an elder in jade robes who had a long and narrow face. He was as thin as bamboo, and his eyes seemed to glow with a cold and bewitching light.

It was Old Devil Qu!

He was a Heaven Ascension stage expert who was skilled in the art of searching and controlling the soul.

He had been sent by the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak Lin Branch Clans. He had originally planned to work with Linghu Xiu to capture Lin Xun and turn him into a mindless puppet.

However, Old Devil Qu knew that the situation had changed when he saw Linghu Xiu return alone.

“There was a draconic cry earlier, and something big seemed to have happened. What’s going on?”

Old Devil Qu’s voice was sharp and raspy like a hissing viper, making it unpleasant to the ear.

Linghu Xiu sighed. After a long silence, he began to recount everything that had happened.

After hearing everything, Old Devil Qu’s expression turned uncertain. After a long time, he said, “Hence you ultimately chose to give up?”

Linghu Xiu sneered. “What else? Lin Xun will become the most famous person in the Forbidden City before nightfall and will draw all the great factions’ attention. Under these circumstances, anyone who dares to kill him will become an enemy of the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy! I still want to live a few more years and won’t do something so stupid!”

Old Devil Qu became silent. He knew that Linghu Xiu was telling the truth. Lin Xun’s rise could no longer be stopped, and anyone who decided to be his enemy at this juncture would have to be prepared for vengeance from Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, Shen Tuo, and the other rune grandmasters!

“I’ve already decided to cut my ties with the Flying Peak Lin Clan.”

Linghu Xiu resolved himself. “It’s not worth it to offend Lin Xun because of them! I advise you to also stop being involved in this affair. At the end of the day, it is an internal conflict of their Lin Clan, and an outsider like you will always be the most at risk.”

Old Devil Qu’s expression changed drastically before he chuckled and said, “I’m not afraid.”

However, he soon sighed. “However, it’s indeed different this time. I will consider your advice.”

After which, he turned to leave the room.

Linghu Xiu gave one final piece of advice, “If you wish to extract yourself, it will be best to leave as soon as possible.”

Old Devil Qu did not reply.

.....

In the carriage, Lin Xun tiredly massaged his temples as he instructed, “Uncle Zhong, after we return to Mind Cleansing Peak, reject everyone who wishes to see me no matter who it is. I will deal with everyone once I recover.”

Lin Zhong nodded. Soon after, he could not help but ask, “Young Master, the heaven-shaking dragon cries earlier...”

Lin Xun chuckled. “I did not foresee that passing the rune grandmaster test would create such a huge commotion.”

Lin Zhong immediately became excited.

He had already sensed that something was strange when he saw Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, Shen Tuo, and the other bigwigs accompany Lin Xun out of the Rune Master Association HQ.

After obtaining a clear answer from Lin Xun, Lin Zhong was finally certain that the Young Master had already become a genuine rune grandmaster!

Moreover, he had caused a huge disturbance that shook the entire city!

The more Lin Zhong thought about it, the more excited he became.

The Young Master would be sixteen in two months, but he was already a rune grandmaster!

That was even more amazing than the famous Feng Qingyou! If the Master and Madam were still alive, how happy would they be when they found out about the Young Master's achievements?

If the other direct Lin Clan members were still alive, how proud would they feel?

Outside the carriage, Third Old Zhu's expression was stoic and expressionless as usual.

Deep in his heart, however, he was repeating a single sentence: Nine draconic cries...the rumor from a thousand years ago is true...

When they returned, Lin Xun headed straight for the private cultivation room on Mind Cleansing Hall's third floor and began to recover.

He was genuinely drained.

Lin Zhong and Third Old Zhu went to find Spirit Vulture.

"Nine draconic cries, perfectly passing the test, a rune grandmaster who is almost sixteen..."

Spirit Vulture could not help but be stunned after finding out about the feats Lin Xun had achieved at the Rune Master Association HQ. These achievements were shocking and inconceivable.

After a long time, Spirit Vulture sighed deeply and said, "I am now finally sure that he was serious when he said he intended to find a cure for the Demon Tribulation Poison by making rune armaments."

He had not expected Lin Xun to attain such a dazzling achievement in a mere two months. It was just too fast!

Third Old Zhu flatly said, "Becoming a rune grandmaster does not mean he will be able to craft a rune armament."

"However, he is the only person in a thousand years who has summoned the nine draconic cries."

This was the first time Third Old Zhu had voluntarily participated in a conversation, which stunned Spirit Vulture. "Do you think Lin Xun will be able to help you enter the Cycle Derivation Tower deep in the palace and resolve your cultivation breakthrough difficulties?"

Third Old Zhu was silent for a moment before he replied, "We'll know in the future."

It was an extremely conservative answer, but Spirit Vulture was very satisfied with it. At the very least, he could tell that Third Old Zhu's attitude had changed a little, and he was no longer indifferent and without hope like before.

"We can put these aside for now. Lin Xun once mentioned that crafting rune armaments is a method that can kill many birds with one stone. It is great that he is now one step closer towards his plan."

Spirit Vulture continued to verbalize his thoughts, "The nine draconic cries must have drawn the entire city's attention. Starting today, Lin Xun is no longer merely the master of Mind Cleansing Peak but also a rune grandmaster with amazing ability! In addition, he is a great talent who is highly regarded by the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy!"

He paused for a moment before he continued, "This new status will allow him to further solidify his position as successor. Moreover, we can expect the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak branch clans to become uneasy when they find out. This will be a heavy blow to them."

Spirit Vulture smiled faintly as he sighed again. "This move of Lin Xun's is pure genius. I can already imagine how his name will be the talk of the entire city tomorrow! The Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy will definitely be looking to reach out to Lin Xun, and his situation will certainly change again no matter which organization he chooses to join!"

"Mister is right."

Lin Zhong could not help but feel a sense of admiration. Spirit Vulture was indeed better than anyone else at seeing the big picture.

"Haha, I am only providing my analysis. The truly amazing one is Lin Xun. If I didn't know him personally, I would not dare to believe that he's still a young man."

Spirit Vulture let out a hearty chuckle.

Lin Zhong also laughed. His heart was filled with pride.

Even Third Old Zhu nodded and said, "Duke Daochen has a good descendent."

.....

Spirit Vulture underestimated the impact created by Lin Xun. On that same night, news of what happened in the Rune Master Association HQ spread to the entire city like a wildfire, causing countless commotions and uproars!

Chapter 395 Who were the New Melody and New Lyrics for?

The sky was still dark when Liu Qingyan arrived at Lingyun House.

She took a window seat on the third floor and began to slowly sip her tea as she peered outside.

The streets were peaceful and quiet in the morning. The morning mist drifted in the alleyways as the hanging chrysanthemums on the sides of the streets swayed gently in the breeze.

Liu Qingyan had recently been in secluded cultivation to write a new melody because she had been invited to do a performance at the royal palace for the empress' 300th birthday.

The melody had been completed yesterday but it did not have any lyrics. Hence, she had come to Lingyun House early in the morning to meet a lyrical grandmaster for help.

It was not long before an elder in old-fashioned clothes hurried up the stairs. When he saw Liu Qingyan already waiting, he could not help but smile bitterly and sigh.

The elder's hair was messy, his eyes were blood-shot, and fatigue was clearly visible between his brows, making him look rather haggard.

He was called Su Sanshi and was a lyrical grandmaster who had written many famous and popular songs. He had remarkable literary talent, was highly praised by the people, and was respectfully called Master Su.

"Sigh, I'm ashamed that I failed to write a single verse the entire night. I have disappointed Miss Qingyang."

Master Su sighed.

Liu Qingyan invited him to sit down and gently said, "Sir, you should not blame yourself. I am the one who was too anxious."

Master Su shook his head. "No, I kept trying to force things but ended up being hindered by frustration. As the saying goes, inspiration and talent are needed to create a masterpiece. I failed to find inspiration because I was too hasty."

Liu Qingyan also felt powerless, but she maintained a kind smile as she tried to console Master Su.

"I have to admit that Miss Qingyan's new melody truly displays your unique ideology and creativity that surpasses the boundaries of time. The melody is filled with passion and fills the heart with meaning. It is a true masterpiece that can rival Steel-Blood King Ning Bugui's 'River of Crimson'."

Master Su's voice was filled with emotion as he said, "Hence why I believe that ordinary lyrics are unworthy of this masterpiece."

"Sir, you flatter me too much."

Liu Qingyan displayed a modest smile.

The two conversed for a long time. In the end, they agreed to meet again after Master Su wrote new lyrics.

Just as Liu Qingyan was planning to leave, a commotion was suddenly heard from the first floor.

"Golden light soaring in the heavens! Nine draconic cries! From today, the Forbidden City has gained another young rune grandmaster who is even more amazing than Feng Qingyou! He's the master of Mind Cleansing Peak, Lin Xun!"

"Lin Xun truly defies all logic. I still can't fathom how he became a rune grandmaster at such a young age."

“He’s not just any rune grandmaster. The broadcast screen just reported that Lin Xun took a test at the Rune Master Association Headquarters yesterday. His overly perfect result was what caused the legendary nine draconic cries that shook the entire city!”

“God damn, is that true?”

“Have you been living under a rock? Everyone has been talking about it like crazy!”

“Quick, let’s go to the broadcast screen and have a look!”

Various voices rose one after another, breaking the peace of the morning and creating a noisy atmosphere.

Liu Qingyan was stunned.

Lin Xun? Rune grandmaster? Nine draconic cries?

A certain handsome figure surfaced in her mind. His eyes were clear and deep, and he always wore a friendly and innocent smile.

Could it be him?

Before Liu Qingyan could return to her senses, another commotion erupted from the street.

The pedestrians had astonished, curious, and excited expressions as they discussed the matter of Lin Xun becoming a rune grandmaster.

Golden light in the sky, nine draconic cries, breaking a record, creating a legend...all kinds of crazy things were talked about.

Some even brought up how Chu Donghai had humiliated himself and fainted.

The Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy fighting over Lin Xun also drew much envy and was one of the more popular topics.

Liu Qingyan dazedly listened to the various conversations.

She had been in seclusion for the past few days and was naturally unaware that the young man who had once helped her repair her ocarina in Haze City had become so famous in the Forbidden City!

Liu Qingyan could not help but question whether this was the same Lin Xun she knew.

Is it really him?

Liu Qingyan could not decide.

Pah!

A loud noise suddenly awakened Liu Qingyan from her thoughts.

Opposite her, Master Su became incredibly excited all of a sudden and slapped the table with gleaming eyes.

“Such a youngster is the pride of the empire! I have found the inspiration to write a new song for Miss Qingyan!”

He quickly dipped his finger into the tea and ignored everything else as he began writing on the table.

Liu Qingyan could not help but rejoice. She never imagined that Master Su would suddenly be struck by inspiration, and it was honestly an unexpected but happy surprise.

She looked over and watched the words begin to flow from Master Su’s fingertips!

The red sun rises, shining its glorious rays.

The river flows, pouring into the ocean.

The hidden dragon soars across the abyss, brandishing its claws.

The tiger’s roar echoes in the valley, frightening a hundred beasts.

The eagle tests its wings, scattering wind and dust.

The budding flower is the most magnificent and radiant!

Wearing the blue sky on our heads and touching the yellow earth with our feet.

Our history is rich and deep, the world is our oyster.

Our futures are as limitless as the ocean and the time we have is still long and far.

Our young empire is beautiful and is as eternal as the heavens!

Our young empire is majestic and has no borders like the land!

Liu Qingyan could not help but recite the words out loud. They felt like wind and thunder and shook the depths of her soul. The lyrics seemed to be filled with a faint yet majestic spirit and burned with a noble, fiery passion that satiated the heart. Merely reading it made one feel a surge of excitement and unspeakable shock.

“Great lyrics!”

Liu Qingyan praised out loud, feeling overjoyed. These new lyrics paired perfectly with the melody she had composed.

"Hahaha, I would not have been inspired to write it if I didn't hear all that talk about Lin Xun."

Master Su also laughed heartily. All of his tiredness seemed to have been swept away.

I didn't expect that he would somehow end up helping me...

A strange smile rose from the corners of Liu Qingyan's lips.

After leaving Lingyun House, Liu Qingyan did not rush back to her accommodations and instead took a stroll in the streets inside her carriage.

No matter where she went, nearly everyone was talking about Lin Xun!

It was as if his name had placed the entire city under a spell.

Liu Qingyan was subsequently able to piece together Lin Xun's experiences in the Forbidden City from the various conversations about him.

For example, she learned about Lin Xun's title as the weakest noble clan leader. She found out about how he had beaten up disciples from the Song and Hua high clans...

The duel with Hua Wuyou...

Lin Xun's current circumstances...

All of these events were being investigated and discussed by people.

Liu Qingyan could not help but sigh. Although some time had passed since they last met, she had to now view him in a completely different light!

Lin Xun was no longer the same. He had already risen to power and fame at an inconceivable speed!

Towards the end, Liu Qingyan could not help but recall a few verses of Master Su's new lyrics.

The hidden dragon soars across the abyss, brandishing its claws.

The tiger's roar echoes in the valley, frightening a hundred beasts.

The eagle tests its wings, scattering wind and dust.

Wasn't this referring to Lin Xun?

.....

The Forbidden City was abuzz with excitement today. It could be said that the news about Lin Xun had spread like a pandemic.

Every street, inn, guest house, tea shop... was all filled with discussion about Lin Xun as if everyone felt it would be shameful if they didn't mention him.

The most outrageous part was when the broadcast station invited a senior rune grandmaster to give a lengthy analysis of the nine draconic cries Lin Xun caused. It drew numerous listeners and created quite a sensation in itself.

Stone Cauldron Alms.

When Shi Yu heard the news, his first reaction was to curse, "What the hell!"

All sorts of emotions churned in his heart. Lin Xun keeps surprising me.

In fact, he was now certain that the aeth-treasure-tier Azure Cloud Copper Truncheons from Lin Xun were actually personally crafted by him!

"Damn, this bastard is becoming more and more outrageous. It will be difficult to surpass him in the future..."

Shi Yu smiled bitterly.

It was not long before he fell into deep thought. Lin Xun was not even sixteen yet, but he had already obtained a perfect score on the Dragon Gate Nine Tablets exam. He was no ordinary rune grandmaster, but an existence who had broken all past records and created a miracle!

Being such an unrivaled and unique young rune grandmaster would definitely bring endless fame and glory to Lin Xun. Likewise, it would also draw much attention to him and even allow him to gain support from various factions.

Regretfully, Shi Yu knew that besides money, Stone Cauldron Alms could not compare to powerful factions like the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy.

In other words, Stone Cauldron Alms was too small for Lin Xun.

Otherwise, Shi Yu would have done everything he could, resorting to even cheating and lying, to pull Lin Xun into his camp.

"I wonder which faction he will choose..."

Shi Yu pondered.

Before he could think about the answer, several groups of guests arrived in rapid succession.

It turned out to be representatives from the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, Qinglu Academy, and other powerful factions.

Their goals were astonishingly similar. They hoped that Shi Yu could help convince Lin Xun to join their factions. If Shi Yu succeeded, they would definitely give him a reward he would be satisfied with.

It was because Mind Cleansing Peak was currently refusing all visitors, leaving them no chance to contact Lin Xun. Hence, they could only approach Lin Xun's friend, Shi Yu, instead in hopes that they could work something out.

This made Shi Yu's feelings turn increasingly complicated. In the past, Third Young Master Shi was a person others would try to pull strings to meet but now, he had become one of those strings instead!

In the end, Shi Yu rejected all of them. It was not because he felt it was beneath him. Instead, he understood that such matters concerned Lin Xun's future and were not something he should interfere in.

Chapter 396 Everything is a Piece on the Chess Board

The Chi Clan.

The study was covered in heavy silence.

Chi Lingxiao was seated before his desk in silence. His brows were tightly furrowed as if he had encountered a difficult problem.

Chi Cangmei respectfully stood to the side. At a closer inspection, her expression was somewhat dazed and out of sorts.

She had already heard the news yesterday night and found out about everything that Lin Xun had done in the Rune Master Association Headquarters.

It had been a huge shock to her, and she had spent a sleepless night in disbelief.

Several months ago, in the Sky Martial Arena, Lin Xun had obtained a beautiful victory over the girl genius Hua Wuyou. It was a feat that spread his name to the entire Forbidden City, and he was praised by many as a cultivation genius of the younger generation.

Although it had only been a few months ago, Lin Xun had stirred up such a big commotion again. How could Chi Cangmei not feel astonished?

The most frightening part was that it had nothing to do with Lin Xun's cultivation this time, but a more difficult and stringent path—runes!

The golden light spoken of in the legend, the foretold nine draconic roars, a rune grandmaster who wasn't even sixteen yet...

All of it felt like a dream that no one in their right mind would believe. If Chi Cangmei hadn't verified it several times, she would have also felt that it was a mere fairy tale!

Only today, when she began to return to her senses, did Chi Cangmei realize the gravity of the situation.

After this incident, Lin Xun's fame would soar like a dazzling star that was rising above the Forbidden City. He had become a city-wide sensation that everyone had their attention on.

This made it increasingly difficult to deal with Lin Xun in the future!

As such, Chi Cangmei could not help but seek an audience with her father, Chi Lingxiao, to hear his thoughts on the matter.

However, she was soon shocked because her father also seemed to be in disbelief and was caught off-guard by this turn of events.

This was a sign of how inconceivable Lin Xun's rise was.

After a long time, Chi Lingxiao finally chuckled and said, "He's...truly an unconventional person. Being recognized as a rune grandmaster has further solidified his position and made his situation less dangerous."

Chi Cangmei had also realized this and felt complicated.

It had only been half a year since Lin Xun first stepped into the Forbidden City. Who could have imagined that a frail youth would rise to power at such an inconceivable speed and accomplish so much?

It was frightening!

He was already such a monster at this young age. If he was allowed to grow up, the fallen Lin Clan would also regain its former glory!

"However, he is shining too dazzlingly and has made those originally hidden factions grow increasingly wary of him. It is difficult to predict whether this will be good or bad."

Chi Lingxiao's expression turned dark.

"Which factions?"

Chi Changmei couldn't help but ask. This question had plagued her for a long time.

She genuinely could not imagine how there could be so many complications tied to a single person.

Chi Lingxiao thought for a moment and replied, "Do you still remember when the clan gave you the task of stopping Lin Xun from entering the Forbidden City?"

Chi Cangmei nodded.

Chi Lingxiao displayed a strange expression. "Our Chi Clan...was merely following orders. You should know how few factions can command our Chi Clan in the empire."

Chi Cangmei's heart violently shuddered as her expression changed slightly. "Could it be the royal palace? Or the star-gazing platform?"

Chi Lingxiao did not answer. He merely said, "It's not that simple. You will understand in the future."

Chi Cangmei did not relent. "How long will that take?"

Chi Lingxiao was taken aback. After briefly pondering, he said, "At least five to at most ten years."

"It's merely dealing with Lin Xun. Why is there a time restriction?"

Chi Cangmei immediately pinpointed something.

"Because everyone is waiting for a clear command."

Chi Lingxiao's expression turned indifferent as he waved his hand. "You may leave. The more Lin Xun jumps about now, the more it will hurt when he falls. No need to overly concern yourself with him."

Chi Cangmei sighed and turned around to leave.

She knew that her status was still too low, and many details were still restricted to her.

From this, it could also be deduced that there must be numerous, astonishing secrets hidden behind Lin Xun. Why else would the situation be so complicated behind the scenes?

"No matter what happens, I will discover your origins!"

Chi Cangmei promised herself.

She felt that Lin Xun was her archenemy and she constantly felt an unexplainable danger from him. She knew that she would never rest easy until she defeated him!

.....

The Castle of Darkness.

"Lin Xun's rise was too sudden and has caught all of the factions off-guard. I don't know if it will be a blessing or a curse."

“Is there any reaction from that old thing on the star-gazing platform?”

“Nothing for now.”

“Heh, he truly has nerves of steel. He should understand better than anyone the significance of a young rune grandmaster who can cause the nine draconic cries.”

The Dark Night Queen’s and the old man’s conversation echoed in the empty and dark hall.

Like always, the old man had a humble and kind expression. His posture was slightly lowered in deference, and his etiquette was flawless.

He seemed to be hesitating about something. After a long time, he finally said, “Milady, a remarkable talent like Lin Xun is already sufficiently qualified for us to recruit him into the Castle of Darkness.”

“No!”

The Dark Night Queen’s answer was firm. There was no hesitation at all.

This stunned the old man.

“His identity is too special. Only two scenarios will occur if he enters the Castle of Darkness. Either he will be implicated by the Castle of Darkness or the Castle of Darkness will be implicated by him. The latter has a higher chance of happening.”

The Dark Night Queen’s uniquely magnetic and husky voice sounded, “You should know that he’s not merely a descendent of the Lin Clan but also Lu Boya’s successor.”

Lu Boya!

The old man was silent for a time. He barely knew anything about Lu Boya and had once tried to investigate his origins, but ultimately failed to discover anything of value.

However, someone who was constantly in the Dark Night Queen’s thoughts was definitely no ordinary person.

The old man could not help but wonder who Lu Boya was. The fact that even the old man didn’t know much about him was quite inconceivable.

After all, with his current status and power, even some of the royal palace’s secrets would be revealed if he wished to seek them out. However, he remained completely clueless about Lu Boya.

It was irrational.

The Dark Night Queen suddenly asked, “How is Xia Zhi doing?”

The old man swiftly answered, “The power in her body has been rapidly awakening ever since you sent her into the Dark Night Ancient Realm...”

“How much longer before she’ll be able to face Cyclic Derivation experts?”

“At least five years.”

The old man answered after pondering for a long time. He did not dare to be too certain either.

“Too slow...”

The Dark Night Queen sighed softly. “Hmm, it does make sense. After all, mere training can never compare to real combat. Let her continue for a few more days before making arrangements to send her to the Blood Devil Battlefield.”

“Milady, that’s too dangerous.”

The old man’s eyes narrowed. The Blood Devil Battlefield was an extremely dangerous area that even Heaven Ascension experts did not dare to recklessly enter!

“The more dangerous it is, the more effectively she’ll be able to stimulate the power in his body. Do as I have instructed.”

The Dark Night Queen’s voice was indifferent.

The old man was momentarily stunned. He suddenly realized something and jerked his head up to gaze at the supreme white bone throne. “Milady, you...”

“I do not have much time left.”

The Dark Night Queen seemed to know what he was going to say. She softly said, “It is a tribulation I have to challenge.”

The old man’s expression turned complicated. He finally realized why the Lady said Xia Zhi’s power was awakening too slowly...

.....

The star-gazing tower rose from the thousand-foot-tall Mount Zijing.

The view from here overlooked more than half of the Forbidden City.

Although it was not late into the night, the Heavenly Seer had made a rare appearance on the star-gazing platform. His thin figure stood before the railings, embracing the cold wind as he peered into the distance.

His white hair danced in the wind, revealing his wrinkled, old face. However, his eyes were pure and bright like a child’s.

No one knew that the Heavenly Seer had climbed to the star-gazing platform last night when he heard the news about Lin Xun and had spent the entire night here.

No one knew what the Heavenly Seer was thinking about either.

“How great it would be if that bloody incident didn’t happen...”

The Heavenly Seer sighed as the sky began to turn blood-red due to the setting sun.

The sound of footsteps was suddenly heard.

The Heavenly Seer did not move, but his expression returned to its usual indifference. He seemed to already know who was coming and said, “Ninth Prince, have you grown restless again?”

A young man wearing yellow robes appeared on the star-gazing platform. He respectfully bowed to the old man near the railings before he self-mockingly said, "How can anyone remain indifferent when something so big has happened?"

He paused and took a deep breath to prepare himself before he gazed at the old man's thin back and said, "Heavenly Seer, if you are still not going to give me a clear answer, I...might have no choice but to take things into my own hands."

"Take things into your own hands?"

The Heavenly Seer turned around. His clear and pure eyes stared at the young man.

The Ninth Prince's expression immediately changed as an unexplainable chill rose in his body, causing him to freeze.

However, he still gritted his teeth and said, "That's right. I can't wait any longer. From the beginning, Lin Xun should never have appeared in the Forbidden City!"

"You're blaming me?"

The Heavenly Seer's voice felt chillingly indifferent.

The Ninth Prince trembled as his expression fluctuated. A never-felt-before pressure was nearly suffocating him.

With a deep breath, he forcibly pushed down the unease in his heart. "I...did not mean to do so."

The Heavenly Seer withdrew his gaze and peered into the distance again as he emotionlessly said, "You will go into seclusion starting today. I will send someone to personally attend to your daily needs. You can come to see me again when you've calmed your heart."

His words struck the Ninth Prince like a bolt of lightning, causing his complexion to pale as he involuntarily cried out, "Heavenly Seer, why? You...you're going to confine me?"

"All things are just pieces on the chessboard, and events are often difficult to predict. There are certain things that you still do not understand."

The old man waved his hand.

An indescribably terrifying power surged out. Before the Ninth Prince could react, he was sent away by the power and disappeared from the platform.

The old man continued to stand alone on the platform as he gazed at the night sky in silence.

Chapter 397 Hornless Ice Dragon Step

Three days later.

Mind Cleansing Peak.

Lin Xun suddenly awakened from his meditation, and his eyes rippled for a split second.

He had been immersed in a strange dream moments ago. In his dream, he had seen several titanic beings that were said to exist only in legend.

Some were covered in dragon scales with bodies that were crystal-clear like ice. They moved above the nine heavens, breathing clouds and mist as they roamed freely in the skies!

Some carried ancient rock tablets on their backs and ruled over the land with eyes filled with disdain!

Some sat on the mountains and rivers and could shatter stars with a single roar!

Some turned into secret seals that gave off boundless auras that soared into the heavens!

.....

These enormous creatures possessed either dragon heads, dragon bodies, dragon scales, dragon whiskers, or dragon claws, and came in all sorts of strange shapes and forms. However, all of them were incomparably terrifying existences!

Lin Xun honestly could not imagine how he managed to have such a strange dream.

It was why he was still somewhat dazed and shook with fear after awakening.

“Those seem to be the divine beasts that are to exist only in ancient times, the Hornless Ice Dragon, Ba-xia, Chao-feng, Bi-an...” [1]

After regaining some composure, Lin Xun was vaguely able to figure out the origins of the enormous entities in his dream.

He could not help but feel bewildered. However, he soon recalled something and began to investigate his mind-sea.

Another object had joined the Omega Door and Heavenly Water Sacred Bead in his mind-sea. It was an ancient and cryptic-looking word that looked as if it was made from gold—‘Tribulation’.

It was formed from the fusion of the nine rune arrays inside the Dragon Gate Nine Tablets and contained a mysterious inheritance—the Tribulation Dragon Nine Transformations!

When Lin Xun’s senses touched it, he returned to that strange dream and began to see the same enormous beasts appear one after another, freely flying in the sky and lording over the land...

Boundless roars thundered in his ears and shook his soul.

“So it is related to this thing!”

Contrary to expectation, the sight eased Lin Xun’s worries. He was now certain that the mysterious dream came from this word.

“I wonder what this inheritance is. Why was it hidden in the Dragon Gate Nine Tablets and why has it remained undiscovered till now?”

Lin Xun was filled with curiosity as he concentrated on the word.

In an instant, the figure of a hornless ice dragon appeared in his mind. It soared above the nine heavens, dove into the yellow river, and was the very embodiment of freedom. The sight of it traveling through the clouds and mist perfectly described the idiom 'to see a dragon's head but not its tail'.

Meanwhile, cryptic information began pouring into Lin Xun's head.

Hornless Ice Dragon Step, the first transformation of the tribulation dragons. A dragon can be big or small and always has control over whether it wishes to be seen. When big, it can manipulate the clouds and mist to hide it. When small, its scales can conceal all traces of it. The tribulation dragon transformation is the embodiment of movement-arts...

A few minutes later.

Lin Xun's eyes brightened. His expression was filled with astonishment.

Hornless Ice Dragon Step!

The first transformation of the tribulation dragon was a profound and complex ancient foot technique. With its power, the user would be able to swim in the sky, tread across the ocean bottom, and manipulate the clouds and mist to conceal themselves!

When mastered to perfection, a single step could summon the power of a Hornless Ice Dragon that can be used to slay one's enemies!

Although Lin Xun had never learned a complete movement-art inheritance before, how could someone with his rich combat experience be unable to tell that the Hornless Ice Dragon Step was overwhelmingly powerful?

It was an apex-level secret art!

When Lin Xun tried to continue accessing the Tribulation Dragon Nine Transformations, he was shocked to discover that it had become an invisible wall that completely blocked him off.

Do I have to fully master the Hornless Ice Dragon Step before I can access the next part of the inheritance?

Lin Xun pondered. He soon shook his head and decided not to dwell upon it.

He was already more than satisfied after passing the Dragon Gate Nine Tablets test and obtaining an unexpected, ancient secret-art inheritance.

Moreover, it just so happened that the only combat-art he currently lacked was a movement-type technique. With the addition of the Hornless Ice Dragon Step, his overall combat ability had become one step closer to perfection.

.....

"Young Master, you're finally out."

When Lin Xun walked out of the private cultivation chamber, he found Lin Zhong waiting outside with a slightly vexed expression.

Lin Xun was slightly taken aback and asked, "Uncle Zhong, did something happen?"

"Young Master, I've already lost count of how many different representatives have visited us ever since you went into seclusion three days ago. The invitation cards they've left behind have accumulated into a huge stack. Since many of these factions are not small fries, we have left it to you to decide what to do about them."

Lin Zhong explained as he led Lin Xun to the main hall where a neatly arranged pile of invitation cards waited. The cards were stacked up to his waist and there were most certainly more than a hundred of them in total.

Lin Xun was surprised. "So many?"

He casually flipped through them. Although most of them came from the Forbidden City's numerous factions, there were even some from regional governors.

Moreover, these were already the ones Lin Zhong had carefully sifted out. There would be so much more if he were to bring them all out!

"Young Master, you might not yet be aware that your fame in the Forbidden City has reached an all-time high! I don't think there's anyone who doesn't know the master of our Mind Cleansing Peak is a peerless young rune grandmaster."

Lin Zhong's voice was filled with pride. However, his tone soon turned sour. "But that is also the reason why too many guests have been visiting Mind Cleansing Peak, some of whom are very difficult to send away. If you did not come out today, it would have soon become impossible for me to manage."

Lin Xun was speechless. He casually threw the invitation cards to the side and said, "Didn't I say to turn everyone away? You can ignore them all in the future."

Lin Zhong hesitantly asked, "Eh?! Young Master, isn't that a little inappropriate?"

"I didn't see any of them when we needed help the most, but now everyone is coming when things are going well. We will ignore all these invitations."

Lin Xun nonchalantly said, "Moreover, it's they who wish to seek an audience with me and not me asking them for something. The initiative is in my hands. What can they do if I ignore them?"

Lin Zhong asked, "But...won't others criticize our Lin Clan?"

"Let them say whatever they want. Uncle Zhong, I've already made my decision. You don't need to worry about it."

At this point, Lin Xun suddenly recalled something and said, "Right, there's something I have to trouble you with."

Lin Zhong hurriedly said, "Young Master, please go ahead and tell me."

"In three days, invite the Rune Master Association HQ's Grandmaster Yu Beidou, Divine Workshop's Grandmaster Cheng Jing, and Qinglu Academy's Grandmaster Shen Tuo over."

Lin Zhong joyfully said, "That will be good. They've sent representatives several times to seek an audience with you over the past few days. They can't wait to meet you."

Lin Xun thought for a while before he said, "Uncle Zhong, tell me everything that has happened over the past few days in detail."

Lin Zhong quickly sorted through his thoughts and began to recount the events of the past few days.

When Lin Xun found out how famous he was now in the Forbidden City, he could not help but chuckle. It was not pride, however, but relief.

Ever since he entered the Forbidden City, he had constantly been on the move and always thinking of a solution to solve his problems. There had not been a moment's rest because of the constant pressure he had been under.

Today, he had finally managed to find his footing in the Forbidden City and changed Mind Cleansing Peak's situation for the better. How could Lin Xun not be overjoyed by this?

More importantly, Lin Xun now had some influence and power that would potentially help him resolve Third Old Zhu's cultivation problem, cure Spirit Vulture's Demon Tribulation Poison, and solidify and expand Mind Cleansing Peak's influence.

This was the 'killing many birds with a single stone' method he had mentioned to Spirit Vulture before!

"Young Master, this old servant has one more thing to inform you about."

Lin Zhong suddenly said, "Yesterday, the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak branch clans sent representatives to tell us that if they are allowed to return to Mind Cleansing Peak and be given a portion of the clan authority, they will immediately return with their people."

Somewhat surprised, Lin Xun's eyes narrowed. After a long time, he icily chuckled and said, "It seems that they're nearing their limits."

Lin Zhong grinned. "Naturally. Their businesses are losing several million gold coins every month, which has caused a huge fuss in their respective factions. Many people have become very vocal about their complaints, and the situation has become unstable."

"To make matters worse, you've successfully become a rune grandmaster and become a sensation in the Forbidden City, which has in turn increased Mind Cleansing Peak's influence. With such contrasting circumstances, how can they remain calm?"

Lin Xun thoughtfully asked, "Uncle Zhong, what do you think?"

Lin Zhong cupped his hands together. "Young Master should decide."

Lin Xun was taken aback. He grinned and said, "Uncle Zhong, tell them it's simple to return. They only need to agree to two conditions."

Lin Zhong asked, "What two conditions?"

"First, return all of the treasures they stole from Mind Cleansing Peak! Not a single item must be missing!"

Lin Xun's eyes were filled with iciness as his voice turned frosty, "Second, all the traitors who collaborated with outsiders to divide the Lin Clan's assets will be sentenced to death regardless of status!"

Lin Zhong's heart trembled. He turned emotional as he nodded. "That is exactly what they deserve!"

"If they agree, I will welcome them back to Mind Cleansing Peak anytime."

Lin Xun took a deep breath before he slowly said, "If they don't, I will personally pay them a visit in the future to resolve these matters!"

"Understood."

Lin Zhong left to carry out Lin Xun's instructions.

Lin Xun was left in the hall. He was lost in thought for a long time before he finally said, "Want me to forgive you guys so easily? Keep dreaming!"

He deeply hated all of these traitors. Instead of avenging their clansmen, they cooperated with outsiders to divide the clan's assets. In Lin Xun's opinion, all of them should be slowly carved into a thousand pieces!

An unquenchable hatred threatened to suffocate Lin Xun whenever he thought of this. Under these circumstances, how could he possibly forgive them so easily?

After some time, Lin Xun walked out of Mind Cleansing Hall and took a stroll around the mountain.

Wherever he went, the servants and the North Light Lin Clan members would bow respectfully with looks of reverence and adoration.

It was a sincere display of respect. They had heard of the commotion Lin Xun had caused in the Forbidden City, which had naturally changed their attitudes toward him.

Lin Xun was finally able to experience what it was like to be the master of a peak.

Of course, there was still a long way to go to reach his expectations. At the very least, he would have to first resolve the Lin Clan's internal conflicts and external problems before he would truly be recognized as the Clan Leader!

Chapter 398 Instability

West Creek Lin Clan.

Lin Tianlong's brows were tightly furrowed as he strolled through the premises alone. Something was hanging heavily on his mind, and he occasionally became lost in thought.

He had not enjoyed a proper night's sleep ever since he found out about Lin Xun becoming a rune grandmaster.

Lin Xun's rise was too quick!

So quick that Lin Tianlong had no time to respond. By the time he had realized the severity of the problem, everything had already begun to change.

Firstly, everyone in the Forbidden City now knew that the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak branch clans and Lin Xun were on hostile terms, unable to coexist like fire and water.

Lin Xun's abrupt rise was undoubtedly a heavy blow to their side, causing their situation to take a turn for the worse.

It might have been fine if that was all. Unfortunately, the three branch clans were already in a tough spot. Their businesses had recently been on a downward turn, resulting in a loss of millions of gold coins every month!

With these heavy losses already hurting them badly, news of Lin Xun's rapid rise was akin to throwing snow onto an already freezing body. It made a bad situation worse.

Nothing seemed to change no matter how hard Lin Tianlong worked, and he felt like a prisoner on death row. It was a torturous feeling that was nearly about to crush him mentally.

It was indeed quite miserable for a mighty Heaven Ascension expert and the ruler of the West Creek Lin Clan to be forced into such a state.

However, there was nothing Lin Tianlong could do.

On Mind Cleansing Peak, Lin Xun was protected by Third Old Zhu and Lin Zhong and had the support of the North Light Lin Clan. If they tried to kill Lin Xun, they would pay an incomparably heavy price that would ultimately leave both parties on the verge of death.

Moreover, this was not even the extent of Lin Xun's power. He also had the help of Stone Cauldron Alms, the Ning Clan of the Steel-Blood Army, the 'Never Falling Geezer' Gong Clan, the 'East Sea King' Ye Clan, and other powerful factions.

Due to these circumstances, Lin Tianlong did not dare to act recklessly.

After all, Lin Xun had nearly killed Hua Wuyou and had allowed Third Old Zhu to seriously injure Hua Qiancheng. Despite completely offending Hua Qingling, the Hua Clan did not dare to immediately kill Lin Xun.

He had even gotten off scot-free after beating up two Song Clan disciples in Precious Laughter House.

The Hua and Song Clans were two of the seven high clans! These were some of the most powerful clans that had the greatest authority, influence, and foundation in the empire!

If even titans like them had chosen to endure, how could Lin Tianlong possibly dare to do anything?

Worst of all, he was the one who had sent Old Devil Qu to the Rune Master Association HQ. The original plan was for him to work together with Rune Grandmaster Linghu Xiu to find an opportunity to take control of Lin Xun.

Who could have imagined that Lin Xun would not only emerge unscathed but also cause the nine draconic cries that shook the entire city? He had been acknowledged as a true rune grandmaster and had become the hottest rising star in the Forbidden City.

Furthermore, Linghu Xiu had immediately cut ties with the three Lin branch clans.

Old Devil Qi, whom they had placed all their hopes on, had disappeared. Even if Lin Tianlong was an idiot, it was obvious to him that Old Devil Qu had become afraid and run away!

This series of events was like a sudden downpour that caught Lin Tianlong completely off-guard. He was in a state of panic and had lost the will to oppose Mind Cleansing Peak.

It wasn't just Lin Tianlong. Cloud Weight Lin Clan's Lin Nianshan and Flying Peak Lin Clan's Lin Pingdu were also in similar situations.

After much hesitation and struggling, the trio ultimately came to a decision: to have 'a talk' with Lin Xun!

As long as Lin Xun agreed to let their three clans return to Mind Cleansing Peak and give them a portion of the clan authority, they would return with all of their clansmen.

It was undoubtedly a very humiliating decision!

It was not easy for Heaven Ascension existences like them to lower their heads to a mere youth. If news of this spread, everyone would laugh at them.

However, they had no choice. The situation no longer favored them, and even if they didn't care about themselves, they still had to consider their clan members. It left them with no choice but to admit defeat no matter how sullen it felt.

"Everything will depend...on his decision..."

Lin Tianlong sighed deeply as he continued to stroll through the giant clan estate.

Due to the terrible losses of their businesses, Lin Tianlong had no choice but to tighten their spending. Numerous unnecessary expenses had been cut, and many servants and hired cultivators had been laid off.

The results of these cuts were apparent. The large estate had become much emptier and desolate, and there were almost no servants to be seen.

"Sigh, I can't keep living like this. It's been three months since I last visited Precious Laughter House. If this continues, I'll die of boredom."

"Damnit, why do you have to remind me? I used to have an entourage of servants when I went out and rode an extravagant carriage to all those high-class venues to meet friends. But now...sigh, I don't want to think about it."

The sound of complaining was heard from a distance.

Lin Tianlong felt as if his heart had been viciously stabbed by a knife, causing his expression to turn ugly.

In the end, he took a deep breath and changed direction to avoid them.

He had heard such complaints all too many times these days, mostly from the younger disciples. They were accustomed to a life of luxury, and it was unavoidable for them to compare to how things were before and become discontent.

Although Lin Tianlong tried to avoid them, things didn't go as he wished. He soon heard someone grumbling again.

"Tsk tsk, Lin Xun is truly amazing. I can't believe he's not even sixteen but has already been acknowledged as a rune grandmaster. I heard even Feng Qingyou has acknowledged his abilities."

"That's not all. The Rune Master Association HQ, the Imperial Divine Workshop, Qinglu Academy, and other powerful factions are currently climbing over each other to recruit him!"

"Mind Cleansing Peak is going to be rich. With Lin Xun's capabilities, they will never have to worry about money!" ~~novel~~next.com

"Sigh, if...hypothetically if our West Creek Lin Clan had also returned to Mind Cleansing Peak like the North Light Lin Clan, how could we possibly be facing such difficulties now?"

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Lin Tianlong's expression turned even uglier. These complaints were from the younger generation elites. To think that they were all praising and envying Lin Xun now!

This was basically...a slap to his face!

In the end, Lin Tianlong took a deep breath and forcibly restrained his anger. He turned around and decided that he was done with the stroll.

What choice did he have? He was worried that he would soon cough blood out of anger if he continued.

After returning to the main hall, Lin Tianlong sat alone in his chair and soon became lost in thought again.

The clan's situation had become extremely dire, and the clansmen were beginning to lose heart. If this continued, the West Creek Lin Clan would fall apart by itself.

It was all because of Lin Xun.

It felt even more agonizing because it had only been half a year since Lin Xun entered the Forbidden City. If he could already achieve so much in such a short span, how much worse would things get if he were given more time?

Lin Tianlong suddenly recalled the time when Lin Xun had promised to give the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak branch clans three years to consider.

They had all scoffed at it back then, believing he was too arrogant. But now...

Lin Tianlong had no choice but to admit that Lin Xun wasn't arrogant, and it was they who had made the grave mistake of grossly underestimating the boy's terrifying potential!

In less than a year, he had caused all three branch clans to fall into tough times and made them lose their willpower. At this rate, it wouldn't even take three years for everything to fall apart.

"Clan Leader, there's news from Mind Cleansing Peak!"

A voice sounded outside the hall, awakening Lin Tianlong from his thoughts.

He immediately jerked to attention and hurriedly asked, "What did he say?"

The servant's expression turned conflicted. He hesitated as if not knowing whether he should speak.

A feeling of unease rose in Lin Tianlong's heart as he lowered his voice and said, "Go ahead."

The servant took a deep breath and slowly said, "Lin Xun said we can be allowed to return to Mind Cleansing Peak, but he has two conditions."

Lin Tianlong asked, "What are the conditions?"

The servant painstakingly answered, "The first condition is to hand over all of the treasures taken from Mind Cleansing Peak. He emphasized that not a single item can be missing."

Lin Tianlong's eyes narrowed. He forcibly restrained his rising anger and said, "Although it is a little unreasonable, it is a compromise we can make. What is the second condition?"

"Hand over...the...traitors who worked with the outsiders to divide the clan's assets so they can be sentenced to death!"

The words felt as if they weighed a million pounds, causing the servant's forehead to be covered in sweat when he finally said them.

Bang!

The suppressed rage and hatred in Lin Tianlong's heart instantly erupted like a volcano, causing him to slam his palms onto the table.

Wood splinters flew everywhere as the table was turned to dust.

Lin Tianlong's expression had turned exceedingly ugly. He gnashed his teeth and snarled, "Too much! He's gone too far! If that's what he wants, we'll fight him till we die! Go, invite the Cloud Weight and Flying Peak Clan Leaders here!"

Two figures walked into the hall just as his final words rang out. It was Lin Nianshan and Lin Pingdu. They had evidently also received the same news and rushed over.

When Lin Nianshan stepped into the hall, he immediately said in a gloomy voice, "Tianlong, our three clans aren't the only ones who seized Mind Cleansing Peak's assets after that bloody incident years ago. Since we're about to face a catastrophe, it is time for those factions to step forward!"

"That..."

Lin Tianlong hesitated. He knew that once this decision was made, they would be fully aligned with those factions, and there would be no turning back!

Lin Pingdu also spoke up in a resolved voice, "We can't hesitate any longer. That little shit Lin Xun is clearly intent on eradicating all of us. Since he's so callous, there's no need to blame us for disregarding our ties!"

"Should we discuss this with the ancestors first?"

Lin Tianlong frowned deeply as he struggled internally.

“No!”

The other two immediately responded. They knew that the ancestors would never agree if they knew.

“Then...”

Lin Tianglong’s expression rapidly fluctuated. In the end, he gritted his teeth and said, “Let it be done!”

Chapter 399 Straight to the Sky

Three days later.

Early in the morning, Yu Beidou, Cheng Jing, and Shen Tuo arrived at Mind Cleansing Peak and were warmly invited by Lin Xun into Mind Cleansing Hall.

After two hours of discussion, the three influential bigwigs were personally sent off by Lin Xun, all wearing smiles as they left.

On that same day, the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy announced a series of shocking news to the world.

The Rune Master Association HQ had specially recruited Lin Xun as a resident rune grandmaster. He would receive rune grandmaster level perks!

The Imperial Divine Workshop had specially recruited Lin Xun as a resident rune grandmaster, and he would enjoy the workshop’s highest tier of benefits!

Qinglu Academy’s Rune Department had specially recruited Lin Xun as an advanced instructor, and he would enjoy the academy’s first-class treatment!

These three pieces of news shook the entire Forbidden City and caused huge waves.

No one had expected that Lin Xun would simultaneously take up positions in these three superpower factions and even receive the highest level of treatment from them!

It was outrageous, to say the least.

After all, as titans in the field of runes, these three great factions were essentially competitors.

Despite this, Lin Xun was now formally affiliated with all three. It was an unprecedented honor that likely would not be surpassed by anyone in the future!

At the very least, Lin Xun was the only one in the Ziyao Empire at the moment who enjoyed this special treatment!

“I wonder what Lin Xun offered that made these three factions agree to recruit him together? It’s unimaginable.”

Numerous people found it inconceivable.

No matter how amazing Lin Xun was, he was still a young teenager. It was irrational for him to simultaneously take up positions in three rival factions.

“They must have come to some kind of agreement with Lin Xun. Why else would they have done so given their status, power, and influence?”

Some speculated that Lin Xun must have offered them some kind of deal. Otherwise, it would be impossible to receive such special treatment.

“No matter what it is, anyone who wishes to offend Lin Xun must first think about whether they can afford to offend the Rune Master Association HQ, Imperial Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy as well!”

Numerous people felt envious. Lin Xun’s rise was too rapid, and he was practically akin to a dazzling meteor streaking across the sky above the Forbidden City, catching everyone’s attention with his dazzlingness.

“Haha, I wonder what those three Lin Branch Clans will think once they hear the news?”

There would always be no lack of people who reveled in entertainment. Hence, they could not help but gloat at the three Lin Branch Clans after hearing the news.

Of course, there were also wildly jealous people. For example, there was a very experienced rune grandmaster who said, “Lin Xun is still too young. No matter how talented he is, it’s still only talent. He will make a joke of himself when he attempts rune grandmaster level runes for real!”

These words resonated with several rune masters who were already jealous of Lin Xun, causing all of them to also call his skills into question.

“In the path of runes, comprehension is ultimately only comprehension. At the end of the day, a rune master still has to prove their worth through their work. If a rune master is only able to understand the essence of runes but unable to create anything practical, isn’t that the same as being only an armchair strategist?”

“What’s the best way to prove a rune master’s ability? Their work! Only when Lin Xun creates something that shakes the world will he be able to convince everyone of his capabilities. Otherwise, he will just be a monkey wearing a hat and acting as a clown!”

“Preposterous! Letting a young rune grandmaster enjoy honor he has yet to earn is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. How can he convince anyone like that?”

These verbal attacks created quite a commotion. However, Lin Xun also had many supporters that quickly retorted against these arguments.

For a time, countless arguments erupted, creating quite a scene in the city.

This was the way of society. It was forever impossible for someone to only receive praise and not criticism.

For example, there was a young storyteller called Xiao Jinyu from a certain teashop in the city. Some complained that his stories were lousy and were a bad influence to society, but there were also others who liked his stories, praised them for being exciting, and would always support him.

This showed that it was simply impossible to please everyone.

Xiao Jinyu was ultimately still a young person who only loved to be praised and disliked criticism. Hence, whenever he received negative criticism, he would always feel sad and depressed...

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The ruckus in the outside world did not affect Lin Xun.

After sending off Yu Beidou and the others, his body felt much lighter and his heart was filled with happiness.

The talks had gone very smoothly. All he had made were a few promises in exchange for surprising benefits.

Firstly, Yu Beidou had already agreed to transfer the Haze City Branch Manager, Chu Feng, to the HQ here in the Forbidden City.

This allowed Lin Xun to repay some of his debt to Chu Feng.

Next, Cheng Jing promised that he would take care of Old Mo, who was currently working in Divine Workshop, and would allow Lin Xun to take Old Mo away when the time was right.

With this promise, Lin Xun no longer needed to worry about Old Mo's situation.

Shen Tuo also agreed to provide special perks to Lin Xun while he worked as an instructor in Qinglu Academy. He would be permitted to learn and practice the academy's many inheritances.

In other words, although Lin Xun had not passed the national exam, an exception had been made for him to become a 'student.' He was allowed to cultivate in Qinglu Academy like the other students while also serving as a rune department instructor who had a higher status than the students.

How could Lin Xun not be satisfied by these successive gifts?

It must be known that the yearly salary Lin Xun received from these three factions totaled three million gold coins!

That was only his salary and did not include the many other benefits he would enjoy.

All of this was thanks to the nine draconic cries. After all, a young rune grandmaster like him was honestly too special, and there was no one else like him in the entire world.

Of course, Lin Xun also had to promise them some things.

For instance, he promised to craft a rune armament within a year to prove his true capability.

For example, besides completing his assigned duties, if the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, or Qinglu Academy required any help from Lin Xun, he would cooperate to the best of his abilities.

For example, Lin Xun needed to first consider the three factions whenever he crafted any rune armaments in the future.

There were also a few other agreements that Lin Xun considered minor.

There was always some deal or payment behind any gains. Upon closer inspection, neither Lin Xun nor the three factions had lost out in their deals.

It could be said that it was a win-win situation.

Of course, whether or not this relationship could be maintained would depend on Lin Xun's abilities.

"I genuinely want to see what else the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak Branch Clans can bring out to face me!"

With a deep breath, Lin Xun returned to his usual cool and collected expression.

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"Young Master, this is Mind Cleansing Peak's monthly financial statement."

"Read it to me."

"Our total revenue is 1.93 million gold coins. Our total expenditure is 770 thousand gold coins which leaves us with an income of 1.16 million gold coins."

"Noted."

"Young Master, Mister Spirit Vulture plans to use a sum of money to..."

"No need to get my permission on such matters. I'll leave Mister Spirit Vulture to handle everything. Is there anything else?"

"Young Master, the North Light Lin Clan has already handed over all of their assets to Mind Cleansing Peak. In other words, we'll also have to prepare resources to take care of them as well in the future."

"That's good news. Uncle Zhong, you shall handle this matter. Remember, do not neglect them, but you also cannot be too indulgent. You should be able to judge what is appropriate."

"Young Master, there's also..."

"Young Master..."

In Mind Cleansing Hall, Lin Zhong swiftly reported matters that needed a decision or approval from Lin Xun.

This gave Lin Xun a slight headache.

As Mind Cleansing Peak expanded and grew, there were more and more affairs to deal with, leaving Lin Xun with no free time.

This was even with help from Spirit Vulture, Xiaoke, Lin Zhong, Lin Xuefeng, and the others!

It was evident that Mind Cleansing Peak was growing too quickly, and he was quickly reaching his limits despite having help from Spirit Vulture and the others.

They needed to recruit more talented personnel as soon as possible!

Lin Xun urgently felt that they lacked manpower!

If things continued to develop at this pace, Lin Xun would not even have time to fulfill his duties at the Rune Master Association HQ, Divine Workshop, and Qinglu Academy, let alone cultivate.

Worst of all, Lin Xun's cultivation had long reached the intermediate Spirit Sea stage, but he had yet to find any time to enter the Omega Secret-Realm to challenge the next trial.

It was as if he had a treasure mountain in front of him, but he could only look at it and did not have any time to climb or excavate it. There were no words to describe how powerless it felt.

Perhaps some greater power heard Lin Xun's thoughts. On that same afternoon, Lin Xuefeng excitedly brought several middle-aged men over to see Lin Xun.

It turned out that these middle-aged men were Lin Xuefeng's uncles. They had served in important positions in the North Light Lin Clan long ago and were strong and capable individuals.

They had been sent by North Light Lin Clan Head Lin Huaiyuan to work for Lin Xun.

Lin Xun was overjoyed and hurriedly tasked Lin Zhong to prepare accommodations for these uncles.

Lin Xun then went to find Spirit Vulture and instructed him to let them take over some responsibilities he currently had no time for.

Spirit Vulture naturally had no objections. However, he did display a strange look and smiled. "Lin Huaiyuan is truly a wise and farsighted person. He sent these people to assist you at exactly the right time. His sense of timing is just excellent."

Lin Xun was taken aback. He thoughtfully said, "In that case, wouldn't it be better if we could invite Uncle Huaiyuan to Mind Cleansing Peak?"

Spirit Vulture chuckled and shook his head. "Anyone else can come but him because it would be taboo if he came. Mind Cleansing Peak is currently filled with North Light Lin Clan disciples. If he came here to take on some responsibilities, it would be all too easy for his authority to clash with yours and create many misunderstandings and problems. Hence, I predict that your uncle will happily come only after your position is absolutely unshakable."

Lin Xun's eyes narrowed. In the end, he could not help but admit that Spirit Vulture's analysis was spot-on. It was just impossible not to agree.

Chapter 400 Spirit Sea Gold Rankings

Spirit Vulture suddenly asked, "When will you be heading to Qinglu Academy to carry out your duties?"

Lin Xun casually replied, "We agreed that I'll go in ten days."

Lin Xun was not just going to serve as an instructor and teach at Qinglu Academy. He also had responsibilities to fulfill at the Rune Master Association HQ and Divine Workshop and would soon be far busier than before.

"Mind Cleansing Peak is steadily becoming more prosperous, so you can leave everything here to us. Concentrate on fulfilling your duties as soon as possible."

Spirit Vulture said, "However, you need to be vigilant. After leaving Mind Cleansing Peak, Third Old Zhu and Lin Zhong will no longer be by your side. It might become quite troublesome if you encounter any problems."

Lin Xun grinned. "Naturally."

In his view, no matter how dangerous a place like Qinglu Academy was, there should be no threat to his life.

Of course, provocations and trouble were unavoidable.

Lin Xun had already mentally prepared himself to face such scenarios.

However, reality was always cruel. On that same night, Shi Yu suddenly visited bearing bad news for Lin Xun.

"You must be careful. I've received news that the West Creek, Cloud Weight, and Flying Peak Lin Clans have resorted to extreme measures and have sought help from some powerful factions!"

There was a sliver of graveness on Shi Yu's face as he said, "If my guess is correct, these powerful factions are the culprits who divided up your Lin Clan assets all those years ago!"

Lin Xun's heart shivered. "Who?"

Shi Yu answered, "The Zuo Clan and the Qin Clan."

Lin Xun's eyes narrowed. These were two of the seven high clans!

"I also never imagined that these two titans would suddenly be implicated."

Shi Yu frowned. "If we had known about this, we would not have alerted them so early and caused the situation to become so complicated."

"They would have come out sooner or later anyways."

Lin Xun took a deep breath, his black eyes filled with iciness. "I am already very happy to even find out who stole the Lin Clan's assets. At the very least, I would have never imagined that even high clans like the Zuo Clan and the Qin Clan would commit such despicable acts."

"Heh, which faction in the Forbidden City isn't ruthless and greedy?"

Shi Yu let out a carefree laugh. He had grown up in Stone Cauldron Alms and understood the true face of these powerhouse factions.

Lin Xun asked, "In other words, they've already begun to help the three branch clans counterattack?"

"No. From the intel I've gathered, they will not openly attack Mind Cleansing Peak."

Shi Yu shook his head. "After all, you're currently one of the most famous people in the Forbidden City whose influence is growing day by day. Who would dare to openly oppose you?"

Soon after, he frowned and sighed. "However, they will definitely try something sneaky behind the scenes. The hidden arrow is always the more difficult to avoid. This will put you in a more dangerous situation."

Lin Xun pondered and said, "I'm about to head to Qinglu Academy and Mind Cleansing Peak has Third Old Zhu, Lin Zhong, and the others. As long as we're careful, we should be able to guard against a fatal blow."

Shi Yu shook his head again. "From my intel, if the Zuo Clan and Qin Clan decide to take action, they will do so in Qinglu Academy!"

"What?"

Lin Xun was surprised.

"Hehe, no need to overreact. Qinglu Academy is a place where all kinds of people can be found. The many formidable characters that hold positions there mostly come from the Forbidden City's top factions. The Zuo and Qin Clans are naturally no exception to this."

Shi Yu softly chuckled. "However, it is as you said. As long as you're careful and don't give them any opportunities, no one will dare to intentionally harm you in Qinglu Academy. After all, it is the number one academy in the empire! Even the imperial family shows the academy a certain level of respect. Those noble factions will not dare to act as they please there."

At this point, Shi Yu's tone turned serious, "The more outstanding you are, the more attention you will receive, and the safer you will be. You must stand out, and you cannot hold back when it's time to flex your muscles."

Lin Xun was speechless for a moment before he replied, "Was the commotion I caused in the Rune Master Association HQ a few days ago not big enough?"

Shi Yu was taken aback before he said in a slightly annoyed voice, "I nearly forgot that you've been causing a ruckus ever since you entered the Forbidden City."

After chatting some more, Lin Xun found out that Shi Yu, Ning Meng, Gong Ming, Ye Xiaoqi, and the others had already started their semester and were currently cultivating in Qinglu Academy.

Regretfully, the new batch of students would be taken to a dangerous zone called the Ghost Killing Land in three days where they would engage in training and a test for the next three months.

In other words, Lin Xun would not be able to meet his friends in the academy for the next three months.

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Qinglu Academy was located in the empire's western outskirts and had been built deep in the mountains. It encompassed an area of several thousand hectares and was basically a small city.

The buildings in Qinglu Academy had old but interesting designs and were filled with an ancient aura.

The academy stood deep in the mountains, far away from the noisiness of society like a hidden utopia. It was the sacred cultivation land in the hearts of the empire's cultivators.

In truth, Qinglu Academy did have a special status in the empire. Not only because it was a humongous faction with strong foundations and abundant resources, but also because it had provided the empire with batch after batch of talented individuals for the past several thousand years.

These talented graduates might join the imperial army, stay in the empire's heart, or travel to the far reaches of the empire. Regardless, they would each make huge contributions in one way or another to the empire.

It was not an exaggeration to say that Qinglu Academy was an ocean of talent and a holy land where geniuses were as common as the clouds in the sky. Any random person from the academy could be called an elite of his or her generation.

These heaven prides would grow into future lords, hegemons, and key figures of their respective factions.

They might have come from different factions but all of them shared the same identity—a student of Qinglu Academy!

This was the basis of Qinglu Academy's untouchable status.

In fact, the majestic azure deer on the empire's coins represented Qinglu Academy!

[1]

It was a huge honor that proved the academy's extraordinary status in the Ziyao Empire.

Early one morning, when the sky was beginning to brighten.

A carriage brought Lin Xun to the empire's western outskirts and slowly proceeded into the mountains where Qinglu Academy was located.

When Lin Xun got off, he found himself before a large old limestone door that was thirty feet tall and a hundred feet wide.

How ordinary.

This was Lin Xun's first impression. He had not expected the number one academy to have such a simple entrance.

There was even moss growing at the top of the door.

Soon after, Lin Xun noticed a line of ancient words that were partially hidden under the moss—

Life and death.

An icy glance.

A cultivator advances!

Lin Xun's heart shivered. The words were simple, but they implied the proud will of a cultivator who fearlessly seeks the dao.

"They were left by the academy's first principal."

A mellow voice sounded. Shen Tuo was already waiting at the side of the entrance with a smile.

He said, "Come, I'll bring you to the rune department."

Lin Xun instructed Third Old Zhu and Lin Zhong to leave before following Shen Tuo into Qinglu Academy.

It was early morning, and the academy was covered in a light mist. Silhouettes of majestic buildings rose one after another from the mist, creating a dream-like sight.

The buildings were numerous and seemed endless at a glance.

Along the way, Shen Tuo patiently introduced some basic information about Qinglu Academy.

The school was divided into five main departments: the Hidden Dragon Department, the Dao Martial Department, the True Martial Department, the Rune Department, and the Godly Stratagems Department.

New students would first be assigned to the Hidden Dragon Department where they would polish their martial arts and cultivation.

Those who performed well could enter the Dao Martial Department through the yearly exam.

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The Dao Martial Department was also known as the 'elite department' because everyone inside was an elite who had been carefully selected by the academy.

Such elites were nothing like the common rabble on the street. They were true elites who had been selected from amongst the empire's many talented geniuses!

For example, Hua Wuyou, whom Lin Xun had dueled, was one of these Dao Martial Department students.

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The True Martial Department was a tier higher than the Dao Martial Department and was for students with Heaven Ascension cultivation. It was Qinglu Academy's core and only a handful of truly great heaven prides could enter.

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As its name implied, the Rune Department was a place to study and research runes.

The Godly Stratagems Department was where students were taught military formations and strategies.

Normally speaking, students interested in runes could go to the Rune Department to take rune lessons.

It was the same for the Godly Stratagems Department.

Despite all this, the Hidden Dragon Department was where most of the students cultivated and refined their martial arts.

As for the Dao Martial Department and the True Martial Department, they were places ordinary students would never qualify to enter even until they graduated.

The requirements were just far too stringent.

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Besides these five main departments, Qinglu Academy also had places like the martial manual library and pill storehouse that provided resources for the students.

Shen Tuo's introduction was simple and easy to digest, allowing Lin Xun to gain a rough idea of the Qinglu Academy. As for the specifics, he would need to discover and experience them for himself.

"Oh? What's that?"

Lin Xun suddenly noticed a majestic golden stone tablet emerge from the mist far away. It stood several hundred feet tall and was a rather attention-grabbing sight.

Shen Tuo stopped and explained, "That's the Spirit Sea Golden Rankings. Spirit Sea students can only leave their names on it when their combat power is among the top hundred in the academy."

Spirit Sea Golden Rankings!

Lin Xun was immediately interested. Didn't this mean that the hundred names on the stone tablet represented the hundred strongest individuals among Qinglu Academy's Spirit Sea students?