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Strong Wine

Chapter 61: Strong Wine

Li Mu walked into Qin Lie's little room.

Inside the room, pieces of scrapped spirit tablets were messily placed about. Many spirit tablets had shattered into little pieces. Some were even burnt charcoal black and exuded an unpleasant odor.

"You..." Li Mu grimaced. "This place is even dirtier than before you came here here. You said you were going to clean the shop for me, so what's this?"

Qin Lie's face was filled with awkwardness. "I was busy so I didn't manage it properly. It will be better after a while."

Li Mu nodded. "Mn, when one commits all their attention to something, they will not pay attention to other details. Most artificers that are even the slightest bit competent have this exact strange habit you do. Once they begin... they would be fully immersed, miss the other things in life, and be completely unaffected by any other matters."

"Uncle Li also understands artifact forging?" Qin Lie was shocked.

Shaking his head, Li Mu continued, "No, but I know an Artificer. That guy has many bad habits and seems to have an obsession with cleanliness in daily life. He needs to clean everything and bathe many times a day, yet when he starts forging, he would become dirty to a frightening degree. He will not eat or bathe for multiple days and only return to normal once he stops."

"Then, that senior must be extraordinary." Qin Lie suddenly felt respect.

Li Mu smiled but did not confirm or reject the words. "You have recently shut yourself in your room to inscribe spirit diagrams, forgetting about food or rest. Your concentration and persistence is no less than that guy's, but... this is definitely not the most efficient method. Sometimes, taking breaks appropriately, adjusting your state of mind, and waiting until you are fresh and relaxed before continuing can give you unexpected results."

Qin Lie's expression became serious as he said, "Uncle Li, please guide me."

"This isn't guidance, I'm just talking about a habit of my friend in hopes that you can gain a flash of inspiration." Li Mu went silent for a moment and then started once more, "My artificer friend, when he encounters a barrier while inscribing spirit diagrams and

cannot break through after repeated tries, would put it down completely for a period of time.”

He looked at Qin Lie and continued, “That guy will come out and shout to his heart’s content, drink liquor, find a woman to release himself, and completely forget the difficult problem he had. After several days letting go, all his pressure and his exhaustion would be alleviated. His tense nerves would also relax...”

“He would then start again on his artifact and put his full attention back onto the problem he was struggling with. Through this, he would frequently break through the problems he had and find the optimal solution, easily sweeping past his issues.”

Li Mu smiled slightly and stated, “His method is extremely effective. You can try to learn from him and might have unexpected success.”

“Shifting one’s attention to temporarily release oneself, completely forgetting anything related to artifact forging. Returning the mind to a normal and peaceful state after releasing all the built up pressure and then starting over once more...”

Qin Lie silently thought it over, and his eyes gradually lit up. He felt that that Li Mu’s guidance was very profound.

“Thanks, Uncle Li,” sincerely thanked Qin Lie.

Waving his hand, Li Mu signaled that he did not need to be so polite. He then invited Qin Lie. “Come to the courtyard and drink a little wine. A friend will come over soon. You can also accompany me and have a little chitchat.”

“Great.” Qin Lie put down the spirit tablet and walked out with him into the yard.

There was a big tree in the middle of the yard with a stone table and some benches beneath it. There were already some side dishes and wine on the table, giving off a fragrant and appetizing scent.

Li Mu had Qin Lie to sit down and then raised a wine bowl at him, saying, “Come, let’s drink and talk.”

“Don’t we need to wait for him?” Qin Lie asked, surprised.

“No need.” Li Mu smiled faintly and drank a bowl first. He then breathed out the scent of wine in pleasure, saying, “Don’t be polite, come, drink! This wine is very good.”

Qin Lie obeyed and gulped some down. With that, he started to cough loudly, his face flushing red.

He had never drank such strong wine before!

When the gulp of liquid reached his throat, it was like a fiery burning ball of fire sliding down. The next sensation was from his stomach, and it was like molten metal flowing inside him. It was so scorching that he almost cried out.

“Cough cough, cough cough, this wine, this wine is so strong!”

Qin Lie’s body was burning, his stomach feeling a scorching pain and his face became as red as blood.

“It’s like this when drinking for the first time. It will be fine when you get used to it,” Li Mu snickered. “If you can’t bear it, hmm, you can dilute it with a bit of water. When your stomach gets used to it, you can take small slow sips.”

“Then, let’s dilute it with water...” Qin Lie was not stubborn and instantly surrendered, turning to find water. After a while, he came back with a big jug of water.

Li Mu was shocked still, then smiled at him, but didn’t say anything.

Qin Lie held up the big jug of water and was preparing to dilute his drink when his gaze suddenly filled with astonishment, which made him pause in place.

The burning pain in his abdomen had stopped, and a warm and pleasurable feeling gradually spread throughout his body. That thick and strong scent of wine also spread through his esophagus like air and made him savor its indescribable beauty. This feeling when drinking wine... he had never experienced it before.

A dizzy and half-intoxicated feeling was a pleasure to him.

“Good, good wine...”

After pausing for a while, he burped and put down the jug of water. His face red, he picked up the bowl of wine again and took a little sip. He instantly closed his eyes, silently feeling the spiciness of the wine entering his throat, the burning heat in his stomach, and savored it. An intoxicated feeling showed on his face.

Li Mu showed slight shock and reminded Qin Lie with good intentions, “This wine ... is a bit strong, your body might not be able to bear it when drinking for the first time. You better add a bit of water so it won’t harm your body.”

“No problem, it’s alright, I can still tolerate it.” Qin Lie said with a dazed drunkenness.

It was only just two little sips, and he was already slightly drunk. He had gotten intoxicated much faster, and it was much stronger compared to when he drank ten bowls of liquor back at Ling Town.

“Then I won’t say anymore. You take note of your condition and stay within your limits.” Li Mu looked deeply at him, smiled slightly, and said while nodding, “Little Ice is coming...”

Just as Qin Lie was astounded, a big wolfdog that was completely snow-white came in from outside.

This big wolfdog was about one meter long, its fur as glossy as silk and its eyes almost human-like, flashing with intelligence...

When it came over, it headed straight for the other bench and sat on it like a human, its paw grabbing the wine bowl and poured itself a bowl.

It quickly finished a big bowl of the strong wine, and its eyes showed great pleasure as it burped.

Qin Lie looked at the big wolfdog at that suddenly appeared in shock. He asked, “Uncle Li, this is?”

“This is the friend I was referring to.” Li Mu smiled and then he happily stroked the white fur of the big wolfdog. The big wolfdog seemed very comfortable under his touch, its eyes narrowed as it crouched soundlessly.

“Qin Lie, if you want to become a true artificer, you cannot just practice inscribing spirit diagrams,” said Li Mu. He then thought for a bit and continued, “Yes, spirit diagrams are the true core of spirit artifacts and their essence, the factor that decides the level of the spirit artifacts.”

He looked at Qin Lie. “But for a true artificer, they need to know how to merge and refine all kinds of spirit materials to make an ‘artifact.’ Only when there is an ‘artifact’ can you inscribe spirit diagrams on the ‘artifact.’ What you are practicing now is the last step of the artifact forging process, yet you do not seem to be familiar with the breakdown, mixing, smelting, and precipitating of materials to make an ‘artifact?’”

“It is just as you said,” bitterly replied Qin Lie with an honest face. “I’m just dabbling, not a true artificer. I do not have anyone teaching me how to smelt materials to make ‘artifacts.’ I only know a few spirit diagrams, so I can only start from there.”

“So that’s how it is.” Li Mu made a sound and then said, “You should go to Nebula Pavilion and ask to be Yao Tai’s assistant. Yao Tai is an artificer of Nebula Pavilion, his skill in spirit diagrams is... very normal, but he has some skill in combining materials and smelting them to become ‘artifacts.’ You can go and learn from him.”

Qin Lie’s expression changed slightly. He thought carefully and then asked, “Artificers only pass on their knowledge of artifact forging to their disciples and even occasionally

conceals it from them. That Yao Tai... will he teach me? Will he teach me how to smelt materials into 'artifacts'?"

"Haha, what artificers protect with their life is just the core spirit diagrams. Most of the time, they would not be very careful with the art of smelting. This part only requires observation and experimentation. It does not need a lot of guidance to be gradually mastered. Each artificer's true core secrets are the spirit diagrams that they inscribe. That is what they would not easily divulge, even to their disciples."

Li Mu looked at him with a smile. "And for this part, you don't need to learn from him, right?"

"Would he be willing to accept me?" Qin Lie's eyes grew bright. He had been convinced by Li Mu. "Most artificers are very proud, eccentric, and hard to relate to. Furthermore, there are many competing to be assistants, I don't know if that Yao Tai is willing to accept me..."

"You will know when you try." Li Mu smiled meaningfully.

"Great, I will report to Nebula Pavilion tomorrow and see if I can request to be moved to Yao Tai's place," Qin Lie said firmly in his drunken stupor.

"Qin Lie, the world outside is very big and you are just starting out. Youth... is really good." Li Mu sighed emotionally.

"Uncle Li, do you know about the outside world? Can you recount your experiences to me?" Qin Lie's thought wandered away.

"I roamed around when I was young, went to some places, encountered some people, knew of some matters..." Li Mu nodded. He took another swallow, his eyes slightly red as he continued in a low voice, "Just speaking of this continent under our feet called Scarlet Tide, it has at least a hundred Limestone rank forces like Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor. Forces similar to Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley that are Black Iron ranked forces, there are more than ten."

"And above that, there are only two Copper ranked forces... these two Copper ranked forces have dominated the Scarlet Tide Continent for centuries and have taken over the best cultivation resources. Not only that, they possess the best quality mines, they rule the multiple Black Iron ranked forces like Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley, and they control all the beings on this continent, able to decide whether low ranking martial practitioners live or die."

Li Mu paused, looked deeply at Qin Lie, and then faintly smiled. "In Spirit Realm, there are many continents like Scarlet Tide. On the Scarlet Tide Continent, those at the highest rank are only at the Copper rank, but on other continents, there are Silver ranked forces and even Gold ranked forces! Those continents are even vaster than

Scarlet Tide, more prosperous, and even possess wonders you cannot even dream of or imagine!”

Qin Lie’s blood surged while he listened as though he saw a vast picture, his mind floating to the other beautiful continents.

“Uncle Li, since you know this much, then shouldn’t you have traveled to many places?” Qin Lie inquired in admiration.

“Yes, I went to many places, roamed and stumbled for half of my life, but in the end, in the end, I still... sigh.” Li Mu’s face was lonely. He did not finish speaking and sighed. He gulped down the strong wine in the bowl and seemed to be in reminiscence.

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Chapter 62: Nebula Pavilion

The next day, at dawn, after Qin Lie woke up, he discovered that he was lying in that little room with spirit tablets piled up everywhere.

He didn’t remember when he got knocked out cold and only faintly remembered that Li Mu had said many interesting things about the outside world. He didn’t seem to have drank much, either. Yet, he was thoroughly drunk.

Li’s Shop was very quiet; there were no clamorous noises around the perimeter. After he washed up and took a stroll in the courtyard, he found that Li Mu and that big wolfdog named Little Ice, were both gone, unbeknownst to him where they went.

Incredibly, even though he drank to the point of being dead drunk, he unexpectedly did not feel his head pounding away ready to burst open at any moment this morning.

On the contrary, he felt extremely clear headed, and his eyes were also glowing with health and vigor.

“Scarlet Tide Continent, the boundlessly vast Spirit Realm, the numerous valiant powers, the super powerful continents who proudly stands...”

In the little courtyard, Qin Lie stood below a tree and recalled Li Mu’s words from last night as his thoughts wandered. “So the level of existences such as the Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley aren’t the absolute strongest powers either. They also needed to adhere to the other two Copper Ranked powers.”

He felt the his own miniscularity.

“Everything, will have to begin from here!” Looking in the direction of Nebula Pavilion, Qin Lie uttered a low roar, the expression in his eyes resolute and firm.

Soon after, he exited Li's Shop, heeding Li Mu's suggestion, and went towards Nebula Pavilion in the southern part of the city

Over two hours later.

He arrived at Nebula Pavilion and explained the situation to the guardhouse in front of the gate, saying that he was Qin Lie and had come to Nebula Pavilion to check in.

"Please wait for a moment, I will go inform Young Master Kang Zhi. He has instructed us to let him know if you came," respectfully spoke a guard.

Qin Lie nodded.

The gate guard hurriedly left.

Soon enough, little fatty Kang Zhi as well as Han Feng arrived together and happily laughed the moment he saw Qin Lie. "Damn guy, you are finally willing to come report in at Nebula Pavilion! I really can't figure you out, what were you doing at Li's Shop? That's only a spirit material shop, what can it give you?"

"Qin Lie, I'll take you to my father," cordially said Han Feng.

"Alright." Side by side, Qin Lie and the two entered Nebula Pavilion.

Tall and lofty complexes of stone buildings towered within Nebula Pavilion; there were martial practitioners entering and exiting from many of the stone buildings. All of those people held an identity card in their hands as they spoke about something at the registry before the gates.

"Look, that is the training ground. There are many rooms inside; some rooms are gravity rooms, some rooms have relatively denser spirit energy, and some rooms are suitable for meditation. There are also some rooms with thick and tough walls that are used for battles. Martial practitioners of Nebula Pavilion can make use of the various training rooms via contribution points..."

Han Feng pointed at a group of buildings that occupied nearly seven hectares of land and explained to Qin Lie, "Nebula Pavilion's martial practitioners can register through their cards and then choose specific training rooms. Tempering their spirit art and spirit techniques, gaining experiences through sparring, all of these take place within this training ground."

Qin Lie slightly nodded while listening and inwardly exclaimed that Nebula Pavilion was truly Nebula Pavilion; as expected, it was not something that the Ling Family could match up to.

The Ling Family only had one martial arts arena. Other than its size being on the larger side, there wasn't anything extraordinary about it, and no standalone special training rooms existed either, unable to aid a martial practitioner's cultivation by much.

"To the left is the Scripture Tower, it is full of various kinds of books regarding the martial practicing realms and also some low level spirit arts and skills. To the many who have recently entered the martial way, they will be able to obtain a rough understanding about cultivation through the books inside. Mn, respective scriptures with detailed explanations regarding the partitioning of realms as well as the level of spirit artifacts, spirit stones, and spirit arts can all be found there."

Han Feng smiled and spoke once more, "Of course, most of them are all general knowledge. The spirit arts and techniques put on display are also all below Common Sixth Rank. We, Nebula Pavilion, are after all merely a Limestone ranked power, unlike the sort of place like Dark Asura Hall. Naturally, it is impossible for the scriptures and books that are kept here to be exceedingly valuable."

"One can also borrow scriptures to read with contribution points?" A joyous expression emerged in Qin Lie's eyes.

Regarding the various realms of the martial way, as well as knowledge about artifact forging, he didn't know much about them. His familiarity with these general things weren't much at all, which was why he was still worried about breaking through to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm even after his meridians were filled with the thunderous energy.

Without realizing that as long as meridians were permeated with energy, whether it be spirit energy or anything else, it could be considered as having broken through to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm.

—Regarding this, he had already ascertained it through using the Ling Family's Realm Assessing Stone.

The reason as to why he was so confused was precisely because he was not well versed in much of what would be considered general knowledge about the Refinement Realm. This had caused him to be anxious while worrying about his progress for a while.

Nebula Pavilion's Scripture Tower had the introduction to the basic knowledges regarding the martial way within it; learning this, his expression secretly filled with joyous surprise. He decided that he would visit the Scripture Tower more often and thoroughly learn whatever knowledge that a martial practitioner ought to know in order to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

“Of course, all texts in the Scripture Tower can be borrowed using contribution points.” Han Feng affirmed that first and then added on, “However, the number of contribution points needed for high level spirit arts is awfully high.”

“The building across the Scripture Tower, yeah, that one on our right, would be the Artifact Tower. There are some spirit materials and spirit herbs in there. Naturally, the most precious would be spirit artifacts. However, the rank of the spirit artifacts inside aren’t especially high either and are generally below Common Grade Five. Definitely lower than Armament Pavilion’s spirit artifacts, for sure. They can also be traded with contribution points...”

Along the way, Kang Zhi and Han Feng explained things about Nebula Pavilion in detail, putting emphasis on the training ground, Scripture Tower, Armament Tower, and such places where martial practitioners would often visit, giving Qin Lie a very direct understanding of Nebula Pavilion. It also secretly amazed Qin Lie, as he finally understood why Ling Feng and the others wanted to join Nebula Pavilion so much so as though their lives depended on it.

As long as they became one of Nebula Pavilion's members, those training grounds, Scripture Tower and Armament Tower, could all be used whenever they wanted through the means of contribution points, benefitting from Nebula Pavilion’s resources and strengthening their cultivation realm.

This was clearly much, much better than staying in Ling Town to cultivate.

The three chatted as Qin Lie was given a tour, and very soon, they arrived at Elder Han Qingrui’s place. Han Feng hollered before even entering the door, “Dad, I brought Qin Lie here to register.”

“Haha, come in, come in.” Han Qingrui smiled.

“Uncle Han.” Kang Zhi intimately greeted, squinting his little eyes, and then pulled Qin Lie and said, “Qin Lie, call Uncle Han.”

“Uncle Han,” Qin Lie spoke.

Han Qingrui nodded with a smile and sized up Qin Lie with a glance as he said with gentle laughter, “Not bad, young man. Mhm, not bad at all. Even though you’ve just arrived at Nebula Pavilion, this Uncle Han has revered your distinguished name for a long time.”

“Uncle Han flatters me,” Qin Lie said humbly.

“I had already finished setting up your identity card a long time ago. Here, take this.” Han Qingrui handed over a greenish-brown iron plate. The front side of the plate had the insignia of a nebula while the back was inscribed with Qin Lie’s name. “At first, Ling

Lie was inscribed on it, but then, we found that you, brat, had used an alias, even wasting an extra plate for us.”

“You damned chump, to even conceal your name to us back then, how surly!” Kang Zhi snorted.

“This is the Nebula Token.” Qin Lie smiled and took another plate out, handing it over to Han Qingrui.

The Nebula Token was specially made for Tu Mo and Tu Ze by Nebula Pavilion’s Tu Shixiong. It was a symbol of status and also a voucher to enter Nebula Pavilion. It was just that he no longer needed the Nebula Token anymore. Moreover, this token was also extremely important to Tu Ze; thus, he took it out.

Han Qingrui nodded, took the Nebula Token, and then pondered for a bit and said, “Qin Lie, normally speaking, members who have just joined Nebula Pavilion can all choose to follow an elder and decide the general direction of their future based on that. Of the Five Elders of Nebula Pavilion, I am responsible for the management within the pavilion, the distribution of missions, and levying vassal power’s tributes. There is also the arranging of spirit materials and enumerating the contribution points of members...

“Ye Yangqiu, or Elder Ye, is responsible for discipline. Within the pavilion, regardless of who it is that interferes with Nebula Pavilion’s interests or disobeys Nebula Pavilion’s rules, will all be subjected to punishment by Ye Yangqiu.

“Elder Du Haitian is usually in charge of external matters, such as the gathering of spirit materials, capturing of spirit beasts, and assisting Nebula Pavilion in search for new ores and mines.

“Elder Chu Yan and Elder Wei Xing are mainly in charge of external battles, stifling Shattered Ice Manor, and infiltration of other powers.”

Han Qingrui looked at him and explained, “Us five elders are responsible for our own duties and are respectively in charge of different affairs. Of them, my affairs are relatively safe and relaxed, so normally there wouldn’t be any injuries or deaths. Naturally, gaining large amounts of contribution points will also be relatively difficult. Elder Ye Yangqiu isn’t too different from me either, the casualties are relatively few. There is not usually a need for manpower to be replenished, and contribution points aren’t easy to come by either.”

Pausing for a bit, he once again spoke, “The ones who are always in need of large amounts of manpower, are Elder Du Haitian, Chu Yan, and Wei Xing. Their missions are against the external and often move about outside. Hunting and slaying enemies are both relatively dangerous, but it’s also very easy to obtain contribution points. Mn, newcomers to the pavilion can freely choose to hold a position under the wings of any of the five elders. Have you made a decision before arriving?”

Qin Lie blankly stared for a bit. Through Han Qingrui's explanations, he once again gained a new understanding about Nebula Pavilion.

He muttered in his heart that this truly is Nebula Pavilion. The rules are clear-cut, and every single elder takes charge of their duties and is responsible for different affairs, so that Nebula Pavilion is managed in a neat and tidy fashion.

—This is what a power ought to be like.

“Qin Lie, you definitely can't choose Du Haitian or Wei Xing. Du Haitian has grievances with the Ling Family, while Wei Xing... is also Liu Yuntao's underling alongside Du Haitian. Neither of them are in the same camp as my father.” The eyes of little fatty Kang Zhi flickered with a glint at this time as he said, “My dad is in the same camp as Uncle Han and Chu Peng's father, Uncle Chu...”

Last night, Li Mu had also roughly talked about Nebula Pavilion's state of affairs. Li Mu told him that Tu Ze's elder brother, Tu Mo, was currently at the late stage of the Natal Opening Realm, reportedly having almost crossed into the Manifestation Realm. Tu Mo had also both openly declared and hinted that once he breaks through to the Manifestation Realm, he will go to Dark Asura Hall to seek his father Tu Shixiong.

Tu Mo and Tu Ze's parents were both currently at Dark Asura Hall. Furthermore, Tu Shixiong was a commander of Dark Asura Hall; Tu Mo's transition would be easy and clearly planned out.

As for Tu Ze... his realm was still too low and tentatively insufficient to manage Nebula Pavilion. He will follow his father's wishes, which was for him stay in Nebula Pavilion and continue to improve himself.

Only after he reaches a sufficiently high realm would it be possible for him to assume control of Nebula Pavilion. Only then could he be like his elder brother, Tu Mo, and also enter Dark Asura Hall after breaking through to the Manifestation realm, joining his father and elder brother.

Once Tu Mo leaves, the empty position of Nebula Pavilion's Pavilion Master must be filled by one of the two Vice Pavilion Masters, either Kang Hui or Liu Yuntao.

Kang Hui was Kang Zhi's father and was very good friends with Chu Peng's father, Chu Yan, as well as Han Feng's father, Han Qingrui. Liu Yuntao roped in Du Haitian and Wei Xing while Ye Yangqiu did not lean towards either side, giving face to no one...

The way Kang Zhi said it, Qin Lie naturally understood what he meant. However, he had decided long before he came here—He had come for Yao Tai.

“Uncle Han, I wish to follow Great Master Yao, Yao Tai, and want to become his artifact forging assistant. What do you think?” Qin Lie asked in a serious manner.

“Great Master Yao?”

The three, Han Qingrui, Han Feng, as well as Kang Zhi, all had faces of astonishment as their eyes revealed expressions of strangeness.

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Chapter 63 - Great Master Yao

“What’s wrong?” Qin Lie asked.

Yao Tai was an Artificer nurtured by Nebula Pavilion and was also the only Artificer they had. He forges artifacts with Nebula Pavilion’s resources, and the forged artifacts would then be placed in the Artifact Tower so martial practitioners could trade in contribution points for them.

Normally, if weapons of Nebula Pavilion’s martial practitioners were damaged in battle, they were also to be fixed by Yao Tai.

Those were Yao Tai’s daily tasks in Nebula Pavilion.

“Qin Lie, you might be thinking too lightly of this. I know that Artificers have extremely high statuses and are also admired by others, which is why there are many who wish to become Artificers.” Han Qingrui stroked his beard with knitted brows, and continued with sincerity, “However, it is difficult for you to imagine just how challenging it is to become an Artificer. This path... will be far more arduous than you have imagined.”

Qin Lie silently nodded. “I understand.”

“Great Master Yao is an Artificer of the pavilion. He has already been here for over twenty years and can still only successfully forge Common Grade Four spirit artifacts. Mn, his ranking would also be at the Common Fourth Rank.” Han Qingrui pondered and said, “Advancing ranks in Artifact Forging is much more difficult than that of a martial practitioner's realm advancement. Practicing forging would require enormous training resources as support, millions of tempering and research, astonishing comprehensive abilities, as well as... a great teacher’s guidance. Without a great teacher, without anyone to teach the inscription of spirit diagrams, it is nearly impossible to become an Artificer on one’s own.”

“Uncle Han and Great Master Yao are at least friends, and some things are troublesome to say, so let me do the honors.”

Little fatty Kang Zhi voluntarily assumed the duty of explaining. He looked toward a building not too far away, showing Qin Lie that the place over there was precisely Great Master Yao’s forging grounds, then said while bitterly smiling, “Great Master Yao was also previously a martial practitioner, though his realm wasn’t too high. Uh, he seems to

only be at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm even now. It is said that his luck reached as high as the heavens and he unwittingly bought a scripture at Commerce Street. He later discovered that there were a few eccentric diagrams in the last few pages of the scripture. Only after fumbling for a long time did he come to realize that those were the most basic spirit diagrams. Then, he went wild with joy and started trying to forge artifacts through trial and error...

“He gathered low ranked spirit materials himself, and after fiddling with them for who knows how long, he finally forged a Common Grade One spirit artifact. Then, he took that spirit artifact, came to Nebula Pavilion, and found the Pavilion Master at that time, which was big bro Tu Ze’s father. He told Uncle Tu that he was an Artificer and demanded Nebula Pavilion to hire him.

“Back then, Uncle Tu had just founded Nebula Pavilion not too long ago and had a bold spirit that reached the heavens, so he took him in. Great Master Yao could only forge Common Grade One Spirit artifacts at the time. The materials for practice weren’t precious, so Uncle Tu supported him, also hoping that he would succeed in the future.

“In a flash, twenty-odd years passed by. Uncle Tu had gone to Dark Asura Hall a long time ago while Great Master Yao also attained his current Common Fourth Rank from a Common First Rank Artificer.”

As he spoke till here, Kang Zhi paused for a little and bitterly laughed, “Over twenty years, to have only come from the First Rank to the Fourth Rank, this rate of advancement... is beyond slow. The reason why this is the case is all because the spirit diagrams that Great Master Yao had acquired back then were the most basic and simplistic kind.

“A few years prior, Uncle Tu came back from Dark Asura Hall and also brought a Artificer with him. The moment that Artificer saw the spirit diagram that Great Master Yao possessed, he explicitly stated that if Great Master Yao merely relied on only those few basic spirit diagrams, it would be difficult to break through into the ranks of a high rank Artificer during his lifetime.”

“Which is to say, Great Master Yao’s achievements are merely so much, and it would be very tough to advance any further.” Han Feng interjected, “He came into the profession without much proficiency, with no one to show him the path and no guidance from a master. Most importantly, he doesn’t have any way to acquire higher ranked spirit diagrams, so he cannot inscribe higher ranked spirit artifacts either.”

“Not only that.” Kang Zhi squinted his little eyes. “In these years, there were also many martial practitioners who have joined the pavilion, carrying their hopes and dreams, and voluntarily requested to become Great Master Yao’s assistant, hoping to receive his good graces. However, Great Master Yao treats his spirit diagrams as though they were his life and would never speak about any details regarding them, only allowing those people to assist him with the forging.

“You ought to know, spirit diagrams are the soul of spirit artifacts. Inscriptions made without a grasp of spirit diagrams cannot make the ‘artifact’ turn into a spirit artifact. This was also why when those people, who had come for Great Master Yao, realized that he had not taught them anything about spirit diagram inscription after a few years had passed, they all left his side while cursing him in rage.

“After that stingy and selfish reputation propagated, none of the newcomers in recent years were willing to be an assistant apprentice over there. Nowadays, he is doing all the artifact forging entirely by himself. He had also complained to the pavilion, grumbling that there was not enough manpower. But unfortunately, every time the pavilion wanted to arrange some people to him, they would all firmly refuse after some slight inquiries about him...”

Kang Zhi illustrated Yao Tai’s situation in minute details and concluded at last, “If you want to follow Yao Tai, then don’t even think about getting a single spirit diagram from him in ten years. That guy considers his spirit diagrams to be even more important than his life. I advise you to change your mind right now, and don’t waste your time there.”

“Mn, Qin Lie, you can’t really take it for granted and think that he is really some ‘Great Master.’ That guy, even though he isn’t very capable, if he was willing to impart spirit diagrams to others, there’d still be many who would be willing to learn from him. Unfortunately, he blankets those spirit diagrams so tightly that no one could attain anything. Who would still be so foolish to help him work?” Han Feng too offered his opinion.

Through Kang Zhi and Han Feng’s explanations, Qin Lie roughly understood what kind of person Yao Tai was. However, the reason why he applied to be assigned to Yao Tai’s side just happened to not be for spirit diagrams...

“Uncle Han, please arrange me under Yao Tai, I wish to become his assistant.” Under the three’s shocked and confused gazes, Qin Lie said, “I’m not going there for his spirit diagrams, and I won’t stay over there for too long either, about a year or so at most. Trust me, I am not a fool. I have my own plans and reasons for this, so there’s no need for you to dissuade me any longer.”

The moment he said that, the three all became puzzled as they looked at each other’s faces, wondering what goal he could possibly have.

They had explained Yao Tai’s situation very clearly and thoroughly without any covering up; but since Qin Lie still insisted, there was nothing they could do either.

“Alright, I’ll arrange it for you.” Han Qingrui nodded at last.

Holding a writing brush with his head lowered, he very quickly wrote a introduction letter on the paper, explaining Qin Lie’s identity and status. He stamped it and then passed it to Qin Lie. “Take this letter, and just go directly report to Yao Tai over there. Mn, before

that, let Han Feng take you to the warehouse, pick up your garments, and arrange your lodgings.”

“Uncle Han, is it already possible for me to go train in the cultivation rooms and borrow books to read from the Scripture Tower now?”

“Naturally, you still have one thousand contribution points that can be used. As long as you have contribution points on you, you can take advantage of any facility within the pavilion,” Han Qinrui said as a matter of fact.

Inwardly rejoiced, Qin Lie thanked him. Then, under the lead of Han Feng and Kang Zhi, he fetched four sets of martial practitioner uniforms specially made by Nebula Pavilion and was even assigned to a small house.

Through Han Feng and Kang Zhi’s connections, the location of that house was quiet and peaceful, the facilities inside were complete as well, and it was even near Zhuo Qian’s pavilion.

“Zhuo Qian isn’t our Nebula Pavilion’s personnel. She was born in Dark Asura Hall, and her father was also a commander like Uncle Tu. Her father’s ideology was similar to Uncle Tu’s as they both thought that juniors ought to be grinded and sharpened from powers at a lower level, letting the junior generations feel the rigidity in different levels of powers. Through their own efforts and struggles they will advance without being entirely reliant on their parent’s generation.”

“So, she was sent to our Nebula Pavilion at a young age. High hopes were also placed on her by her parents, hoping that she would mature independently through the experiences in a lower leveled power. Mn, she is the same as big brother Tu and have also broken through to the Natal Opening Realm. Currently, she is stabilizing her realm, and ought to come out soon enough.”

Kang Zhi took Qin Lie to that little house and explained as he pointed at a three-story pavilion beside the rock garden and bamboo forest.

That pavilion was very elegantly constructed. There were many designs of spirit beasts on the wall, appearing secluded in good taste amidst the rock gardens and bamboo forest.

This little flat of Qin Lie’s had three rooms, and rubbing off the good fortunes of Zhuo Qian, the surrounding environment was pretty good and also exceptionally quiet; very suitable for quietly cultivating.

“Usually, Han Feng, Chu Peng, and I will be in the pavilion, and we only go out at night to play around. If you need any help, you can come and seek us out. Oh, right, let’s go take a stroll tonight, we’ll hold a welcoming reception for you!” Kang Zhi’s eyes

brightened as his chubby face revealed a hint of ambiguity. "I'll take you to a good place!"

Qin Lie was astounded. "Let's pass on that today. I'm also tired after walking for an entire day and in a little while I will go to borrow a few books to read at the Scripture Tower. My understanding of the martial way's basics is much too lacking, so I need to properly cram for a bit. Tomorrow, I still need to go report at Great Master Yao's place. I don't have time, man. Maybe another day, another day."

"Alright then, after big brother Tu comes out, we are going to go there and play together. That's settled, okay? You can't keep shrinking down when that time comes!" Kang Zhi said as he pretended to be angry.

"Alright." Qin Lie agreed for the lack of a better option.

Shortly, Kang Zhi and Han Feng said their goodbyes and left while he alone proceeded in the direction of Scripture Tower by himself.

"Eh, isn't that the Ling Town's brat?" On the way, a cold voice suddenly came through. A martial practitioner around thirty years old looked at Qin Lie with creased brows.

Qin Lie turned around and gave him a glance, and he found that a group of people had walked out from the Armament Tower to the side.

These people were all subordinates of Du Haitian. They had gone to Ling Town with Du Haitian before and pressed the Ling Family to the brink of total destruction. In the end, however, because he displayed the Nebula Token, those people had to retreat from Ling Town in defeat with their heads drooping and faces ashen.

"Hehe, that kid was engaged to the Ling Family's First Miss, but too bad the marriage promise was broken." One of them mocked with a cold face, "The Ling Family has really grappled onto some high-hanging fruit. Those two girls reached the heavens with a single leap and were directly chosen by Seven Fiends Valley's Granny Jiu as disciples. How can that Ling Chengye... allow such a kid affect his daughter's future prospects?"

"Right, if I were Ling Chengye, I would also have immediately rescinded the engagement." Continued someone else.

The Scripture Tower and Armament Tower were situated across from each other. Around this area, there were many martial practitioners who come and go.

Hearing the ridicule those few spouted, many others stopped and revealed expressions of interest, and even inquired further to ask about just what were the circumstances.

After they figured out the situation and found out that Ling Chengye had thus abandoned Qin Lie for Ling Yushi, they all had odd looks in their eyes, pointing and gesturing at Qin Lie as they clamorously commented.

...

Chapter 64: Target Locked

Recently, Qin Lie had been trying his best to not think about anything related to Ling Yushi and tried to forget about her for now.

This was because as soon as he began to think about her, as soon as he began to reminisce, he would find it hard to calm back down and become unable to do other things.

But as of right now, the mocking and ridicule of those people had made his memories emerge, causing his heart which had finally calmed down... to become agitated again!

His expression suddenly became dark and cold.

“What? Is what we are saying making you uncomfortable?” The first martial practitioner to speak had a cultivation at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm. Previously, he had also been at Ling Town and had seen Qin Lie’s battle with Du Heng. Yet he still dared to act so brazenly because his cultivation was a level higher than Du Heng’s. Thus, he had no fear as he continued mocking, “Nebula Pavilion doesn’t restrict people from having personal duels. As long as no one dies or becomes severely crippled, the pavilion generally doesn’t care.”

He stuck out a finger, pointing towards the distant Qin Lie, motioning for him to come over, and sneered, “Feel insulted? Then come make a move!”

“Boom!”

As soon as his remark was made, the sound of thunder rumbling immediately emanated over from within Qin Lie’s body.

In a moment, Qin Lie who had seemed so weak, delicate, and skinny seemed to have become another person!

A violent, intent surged out of his eyes as strand after strand of fine, blue electric current wrapped around his arm like a fine rope.

Under the surprised gazes of all of the spectators, Qin Lie suddenly launched an explosive attack. Like a fierce beast hunting its prey, he charged towards the person.

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

Strand after strand of lightning began to discharge, interweaving into a violent bolt. Under the sun's extremely harsh rays, everyone's eyes suffered temporary blindness.

"Hmph!"

Du Haitian's subordinate immediately clasped his hands together then quickly opened them as a dark purple sphere of spirit energy quickly gathered at his palms. Within the sphere, dense smoke pervaded and bright light flickered.

A pure, vigorous fluctuation of spirit energy surged out from within the glowing dark purple sphere as the glowing sphere in his hand was thrown out by the person.

"Poof poof poof!"

One stifled sound after another emanated out from within the glowing dark purple ball. Afterwards, a purple colored smoke suddenly dispersed outwards towards the space between him and Qin Lie, filling it.

Mn?

Qin Lie who was charging towards the person suddenly discovered that all he could see was purple smoke, making unable to spot his target.

Moreover, the smoke seemed to have a kind of paralyzing effect. As the smoke permeated into his body, he began to feel tired; even his eyelids began to feel heavy.

"Brat, did you really think that just because you beat Du Heng, you could also beat me?"

The person's cold laughs emanated over from all directions, as if the speaker were right by him. However, it was impossible for his eyes to lock onto his target.

A strong sense of crisis seemingly surged over from each corner, causing the hairs on Qin Lie's body to stand up as his heart and expression became uneasy. He knew that his opponent's attack would be coming soon.

"Dou Yang, this wretch. He must really like to bully people. To use his 'Smoke Cloud Art' right from the start, just how will that kid ever find his position? Must this fight even continue on?"

"Mn, within that purple smoke, Dou Yang can do whatever he wants. That kid will be just like a fool, only able to passively suffer beatings. There is absolutely no way for the kid to see Dou Yang."

"....."

Many Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners stood arms crossed atop the Scripture Tower and Artifact Tower as they watched and conversed over the battle.

Between the two buildings, purple smoke slowly surfaced. Occasionally, they would get a glimpse of the motionless Qin Lie as well as his opponent, who was constantly circling around him at high speeds, as if he were a cat playing with a mouse. Clearly, he wanted to slowly embarrass Qin Lie.

“Just where is he?”

Qin Lie paused. As his vision had been affected by the smoke, he had no way to see the surrounding situation.

At this time, Dou Yang’s casual, provoking, ridiculing voice emanated over.

“Thing who doesn’t understand life and death, do you know what kind of fate you will have, having dared to injure Young Master Du Heng? Did you think that just by entering Nebula Pavilion, you would be able to escape your reckoning? Hehe, very soon, you will understand what you will face in the future.”

“The Ling Family is now involved with Seven Fiends Valley so Elder Du temporarily cannot go settle his debts with them, but as for you... a brat that has been abandoned by the Ling Family, do you think that you can escape from Elder Du’s palm?”

Dou Yang wasn’t in a hurry to make a move, instead using words to ravage Qin Lie’s mental barriers. It seemed as if he wanted to first destroy Qin Lie mentally.

“My eyes... have no way of locating him, so I might as well close them.”

Within the smoke, Qin Lie closed his eyes and calmed himself down. Immediately, he released his mind consciousness, using strands of mind energy to feel out his surroundings.

His mind consciousness swiftly emerged and he could immediately feel the clear fluctuations of life. The fluctuation of life constantly circled around and was moving at a high speed...

“Found you.”

Qin Lie quietly whispered to himself as he gathered the energy of the thunder and lightning around his body. Amongst his ten fingers, electric current suddenly began to discharge!

Amongst the smoke, ten bolts of eye-blinding lightning suddenly flashed!

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

The sound of lightning striking something suddenly came from within the smoke, immediately followed by Dou Yang's miserable cry. It was the sound of opportunity having been seized.

"Boom!"

The sound of rumbling thunder also came out as Qin Lie took the opportunity to strike his target with his fist, hitting Dou Yang right in the chest.

Dou Yang's body abruptly flew out from within the purple smoke, with a stream of fresh red blood splurting out from his mouth.

The stream of blood combined with the purple smoke to form a line. As his body flew out from within, it seemingly became connected with the smoke; it was an extremely strange scene.

"Bang!"

Dou Yang landed on the group, his hair charred black and his expression ashen as he terrifyingly looked towards the purple smoke.

He couldn't understand, couldn't understand why Qin Lie could accurately pinpoint his location. First it had been the ten lightning bolts, and then it was followed by the thunderous fist which had explosively struck his body out of the smoke.

"Eh, Dou Yang lost? Is his Smoke Cloud Art actually unable to confuse that kid?"

"To have been directly sent flying by him. Hehe, it is truly laughable."

"Interesting."

"....."

Mocking expressions emerged on the faces of all of the observing Nebula Pavilion practitioners as they looked at Dou Yang, incessantly laughing.

From within the smoke, Qin Lie walked out, his brows furrowing as he stood in front of Dou Yang, "If not for Nebula Pavilion preventing people from dying during personal duels, you would have already been killed by me just now."

Afterwards, he indifferently swept his eyes over the other subordinates of Du Haitian that had been mocking him with Dou Yang before turning around and walking towards the Scripture Tower.

“Haha, this kid is interesting. Before, I truly looked down on the people who came from vassal forces. I never thought that this time two interesting ones would appear. One named Gao Yu, and this kid... quite interesting.”

“Mn. However, Gao Yu, that kid, is a little bit more powerful. His opponent was Fang Tong, who was at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm and he completely embarrassed Fang Tong.”

“Indeed, who told Fang Tong to have a cheap mouth and say that Gao Yu relied on his relationship with his sister to enter Nebula Pavilion; he deserved his woes.”

“I also never would have thought that although he is at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, he would actually be able to surpass Fang Tong and make him look bad. It was truly shocking. Say, what realm is this new kid at?”

“For him to have been able to defeat Dou Yang, he must have at least also been at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm right?”

“Then between him and Gao Yu, who is stronger?”

“Definitely Gao Yu. You don’t even have to think about it. Could it be that you think he is stronger than Gao Yu?”

“It’s not that, I believe Gao Yu is a little bit stronger. The way that kid looks at others is rather eccentric. He is definitely an extremely ruthless person!”

“Heh, Gao Yu and Liu Yan are currently within Artifact Tower. Before I came out, I saw both of them.”

“.....”

As Qin Lie walked towards Scripture Tower, a group of Nebula Pavilion’s practitioners were all conversing with each other, comparing him with Gao Yu. They discussed who would win in a fight between the two of them, eventually unanimously deciding that Gao Yu was slightly stronger. However, this made it so that none of them dared to casually provoke either one.

“Qin Lie!”

At this time, from the entrance of Artifact Tower, Liu Yan’s voice emanated over. Standing beside Liu Yan was Gao Yu, his eyes indeed sinister and cold.

The two of them had originally been within Artifact Tower. Upon hearing the sounds of fighting outside, the two of them had walked out, only to see that the fight was over. However, with just a glance, they discovered Qin Lie who was walking towards Scripture Tower.

“Big Brother Liu, Gao Yu.” Qin Lie stopped in front of the entrance to Scripture Tower, turning his head towards the two as he asked, “How come the two of you are also here?”

“We were trying to see if there were any good things within Artifact Tower when we heard the sounds of fighting, so we decided to come take a look,” said Liu Yan with a smile.

He looked around, glancing in the direction of Dou Yang. Through the eyes that were all still staring in Qin Lie’s direction, he suddenly exclaimed, “Was it you who fought with Dou Yang?”

Qin Lie nodded.

“Haha, you and Gao Yu, you two brats, are truly prickly! In the three days since Gao Yu entered the pavilion, he has already fought a fiery battle with Hall Master Fang Tong, who is under Elder Weixing’s command. When did you enter? How come you too have already picked a fight?” asked Liu Yan with a weird expression.

“I just entered today,” said Qin Lie, explaining, “That Dou Yang’s mouth was too cheap and deliberately begged me for a fight. I was only fulfilling his wishes.”

“Ha!” Liu Yan turned his head to look at Dou Yang only to discover that him and the other subordinates of Du Haitian were currently walking away with dark, cold expressions. “You and Gao Yu are truly of the same caliber, causing trouble as soon as you arrive. Compared with others who came here with their own power, you two are a little bit too conspicuous.”

“Some people’s mouths are just too smelly and it causes my skin to itch unbearably. If I don’t teach them a lesson, I will feel uncomfortable,” said Gao Yu with a cold expression, his eyes dark. “What Qin Lie did was right. Nice guys are the ones that get bullied. If you behave properly here, it will only bring you trouble. Only if you shatter a few teeth will their mouths be a little cleaner.”

His sinister eyes swept across the surrounding crowd. Those who he looked at all just awkwardly laughed dryly.

It seemed as if they all held some fear towards him.

“It is good that you came, otherwise, it would seem rather boring here,” said Gao Yu, looking at Qin Lie. With a cold expression, he continued, “Last time, we weren’t able to say who won and who lost. I will wait for you to break through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, and then we shall fight again!”

“No problem,” readily agreed Qin Lie, nodding.

“Young Master Gao, forget about it. Don’t go around finding trouble for yourself,” said Liu Yan bitterly laughing, “Last time, you were already at a disadvantage, why can’t you remember it? It isn’t a problem for you to fight anyone. You were even able to fight Fang Tong. However, against Qin Lie... I advise you to forget about it. This guy’s existence is just to restrain you.”

As soon as his remark was made, all of the nearby Nebula Pavilion practitioners who had yet to disperse all looked towards them with a look of astonishment.

Listening to Liu Yan’s words, Gao Yu had actually been defeated by Qin Lie before. How could this be?

When they looked at Qin Lie again, they suddenly felt as if Qin Lie was becoming more and more profound and unfathomable, causing them to become more and more afraid to look down on him.

Chapter 65: Borrowing Books

Qin Lie bade farewell to Liu Yan and Gao Yu, used his identity card to sign in at the entrance to the Scripture Tower, and then walked in.

The Scripture Tower only held three levels. The first level was full of shelves and bookcases with all kinds of books pertaining to the martial way, introductions to each of the individual levels of the Refinement and Natal Opening Realms, the categories and levels of artificers and materials, as well as explanations on the general knowledge of cultivation.

The first floor had books on this area, and all of them were introductory, so they did not have substantial content.

The second floor had spirit arts and techniques for cultivation. Those who possessed a higher cultivation realm would come to read the books on the second level that specialized in cultivation in order to increase their own strength.

The third floor stored spirit arts and techniques that were higher leveled, and only those that reached the Natal Opening Realm could qualify to enter.

When Qin Lie entered, he walked around the first floor. He found the first level held people that were in the Refinement Realm, and the large majority of them were in the fifth and sixth levels.

For the subordinate forces, they needed to break through to the Natal Opening Realm before they were twenty to enter Nebula Pavilion.

Yet for the martial practitioners that were born in Nebula Pavilion, they were not restricted by this.

There were many Refinement Realm martial practitioners here whose fathers were martial practitioners of Nebula Pavilion, whose parents who died while fighting on behalf of Nebula Pavilion, and parents were still fighting for Nebula Pavilion. There was also an extremely small group whose parents had broken through to the Manifestation Realm and were fortunate enough to be admitted to Dark Asura Hall.

Because their parents had fought for Nebula Pavilion and given their life to Nebula Pavilion, even though they had not entered the Natal Opening Realm, they were still able to enjoy the Nebula Pavilion's resources and were born as a member of Nebula Pavilion.

People that lived around Qin Lie were people of this kind; they used Nebula Pavilion's resources to cultivate.

“《Detailed Explanation of the Nine Little Realms》, 《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》, 《Elementary Artifact Forging》...”

Qin Lie silently roamed in front of the bookcases. In a short while, three books that stirred his interest appeared. These three books were placed in different bookcases, and the bookcases were closed, so one needed to request someone to open them.

“Please help me take out these three books,” Qin Lie called lightly.

On this floor, there were two martial practitioners from Nebula Pavilion that were responsible for handling such matters. One of them came and had Qin Lie show his identity card. Then, he said, “To read 《Detailed Explanation of Nine Little Realms》 requires fifty contribution points, 《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》 requires thirty contribution points, and 《Elementary Artifact Forging》 requires forty contribution points. In total, that will be one hundred and twenty contribution points. Mn, you can borrow them for one month. If you cannot return them in time, there will be an increase in contribution points. Do you have any questions?”

Three books, requiring one hundred and twenty contribution points in total. It caused Qin Lie to be slightly shocked.

He had not expected that the three books on common knowledge in the martial realms would require so many contribution points. He silently rejoiced that he hadn't used all his contribution points back when he was in Ling Town. Otherwise, he would be stuck now.

“Mn, then these three first.” Qin Lie handed over the identity card.

That person helped him deduct it and then took out a key to open the bookcases, retrieving and passing on the books Qin Lie wanted to him. He then said, “If the books are damaged or lost, you will need to compensate ten times the cost to borrow them. Remember this.”

“Mn, I understand.” Taking the three books, he looked in the direction of the Scripture Tower’s second floor, decided against going up and left the Scripture Tower.

Three very ordinary books on the first level had taken one hundred and twenty contribution points. One could imagine the fee for renting valuable spirit arts and techniques on the upper levels would require many times the number of contribution points the books on the first level required. It was something he temporarily could not fund, so he did not need to waste his time.

It was evening by the time he came out with the three books. He went straight to the little room that Han Feng had arranged for him.

“Detailed Explanation of the Nine Little Realms...” Inside the room, he picked up the first book and started to read.

This book only introduced the situation of the nine little realms in the Refinement Realm. It stated the tricks to breaking through to the seventh, eighth, and ninth levels, including what kind of state of the body would need to be in order to reach its corresponding realm.

In accordance with what he knew, the seventh level was only satisfactory when spirit energy could be channeled externally. The eighth level was where the acupuncture points could be filled with spirit energy and where energy could be released through them.

As for the ninth level... the spirit sea in the dantian had to form a whirlpool. When the whirlpool formed, that was the sign of the breakthrough.

Of the nine levels of the Refinement Realm, the first six were the accumulation of spirit energy, the refinement of the body. The seventh level was the beginning of the difficulty, and the breakthrough to each level had a very precise method.

This 《Detailed Explanation of the Nine Little Realms》 explained the nine levels of the refinement realm in detail. The eighth level only needed the acupuncture points to be filled with energy. A breakthrough would be true no matter what kind of energy it was. This point was said explicitly.

If he had read this book a long time ago, the difficult problems that he had struggled with when breaking through to the eighth level would have been solved much earlier.

“Ninth level, need to form a whirlpool, the whirlpool would appear in the spirit sea of the dantian and can gradually purify spirit energy...” Qin Lie pondered and gradually felt a direction to train in. “It seems that I need to put some time into cultivation and try to form a whirlpool. The ninth level is a threshold that I need to cross as soon as possible.”

He did not continue to read the two books on spirit materials and artifacts and instead concentrated on forming the whirlpool of the ninth level. He gave in-depth thought to it and then started to put it into practice.

Concentrating and calming his mind, he closed his eyes and channeled spirit energy.

He used his mind to detect and look at the spirit sea in the dantian. He could feel the field of spirit energy in the spirit sea. The spirit energy was like a sea that covered everything. He tried to manipulate it to form a whirlpool. He wanted to form a twister in the spirit sea of the dantian to suck in spirit energy and purify spirit energy, causing it to become purer...

His mind focused, and his consciousness floated in the vast spirit sea in the dantian like a slight gust of wind.

The slight wind blew the spirit energy, and the spirit energy moved like the wind. It spun as it gusted and gathered more around it...

His soul easily entered the spirit sea of the dantian and seemed to see a field of white clouds; that was a cloud sea made from spirit energy.

In here, the spirit energy he gathered were also clouds. It needed to form a hurricane that twisted the spirit clouds together and spin according to his thoughts to form a whirlpool.

Yet, while the spirit energy that turned to clouds was condensed together and was also spinning, its spirit energy gradually dissipated in its revolutions...

The clouds formed from spirit energy dissipated as though they were diluted by water and could not be gathered for long periods of time.

This way, it naturally was impossible to form the whirlpool, and since he could not create a whirlpool in the spirit sea, he could not purify spirit energy.

A long while later, Qin Lie woke up, tired. It was deep in the night, the silver moon hung high in the sky outside.

"It's natural that I cannot succeed in one try, I have to work at it slowly. Mn, at least I found the direction I needed through 《Detailed Explanation of Nine Little Realms》 and know what to work towards." Qin Lie said to himself, "But the spirit energy in the spirit sea of the dantian is extremely thick. This means that inscribing spirit diagrams also increases mind energy and spirit energy."

In this period of time, his attention had been placed on inscribing spirit diagrams. From the Spirit Gathering diagram to the Amplification diagram, he did not slack off one bit.

Inscribing the spirit diagrams consumed great amounts of mind energy and spirit energy. He would only stop practicing when he used up his spirit energy and mind energy. Then, he would proceed to use spirit pills to slowly recover. When his dantian was full again, he noticed that the spirit energy had grown.

“Practicing to inscribe spirit diagrams can increase mind energy and spirit energy but cannot directly help me to breakthrough a level. It seems that I need to rationally divide my time between martial practice and artifact forging. I need to find an equilibrium so the two can complement each other to allow me to improve quickly in both areas.”

His eyes were bright and had a new insight into progressing in realm and artifact forging.

This night, he continued to work on forming a whirlpool in the dantian’s spirit sea and only napped a little while when the sun was about to up.

The next day, he woke up when the sun was high up in the sky, and after going to the Nebula Pavilion’s Food Hall to eat something, he walked alone to Yao Tai’s forging grounds.

Yao Tai’s forging grounds was even more remote than the place where Qin Lie was living. There wasn’t a single house within one hundred meters of that place.

The reason was that Yao Tai had caused a few accidents in the past when forging and created large explosions, so he was ordered to move to such a place to prevent him from wounding the martial practitioners that were cultivating nearby.

In front of the stone hall, were two great copper cauldrons made from limestone. Fire was burning inside the cauldrons, and the crackling sounds coming from inside seemed like the sounds of materials exploding.

Inside the hall came the sound of cursing as though someone was speaking to themselves and venting their anger to the heavens.

Qin Lie stilled at the door and shouted, “Great Master Yao, I am Qin Lie and have come to report to you today to be your assistant.”

“Assistant?” The person inside the hall stopped cursing and greeted, “The door isn’t closed, come in.”

Qin Lie stepped into the hall.

The hall was about ten meters tall and held up by six stone pillars. The interior of the hall was vast, and the walls were lined with large stone cabinets. The cabinets were filled with all kinds of materials, stones of different colors, unnameable wood, many

beast bones, special ores, strange scales, the teeth, claws and furs of spirit beasts, and so on...

A large crimson smelting furnace was in the middle of the hall. Scarlet red fire crystals had been placed under the furnace.

A middle-aged man that was slightly plump stood next to the large smelting furnace. His clothes were dirty and his hair like a bird's nest as he looked at Qin Lie. "What benefits did they give you? Three years, I've asked many times in the past over the last three years, but they didn't arrange a single person for me. What did they promise you?"

"I requested to come." Qin Lie was shocked. "I admire Great Master, so I asked to specifically become your assistant. I wasn't promised any benefits."

"Really?" Yao Tai narrowed his eyes and examined Qin Lie. He nodded and said, "No matter what goal you came with, no matter if you are dumb or if you were promised benefits, since you have come, you have to listen to my orders. What I tell you to do, you will do, understand?"

"Understood" Qin Lie had prepared and said with a nod and smile.

"Understand artifact forging?"

"Not really."

"Then learn from the beginning, learn to recognize basic spirit materials to prevent yourself from putting in the wrong spirit materials in your duties in the future and wasting all my previous efforts."

"I will listen to Great Master about everything."

"Mn, your attitude isn't bad."

.....

Chapter 66: First Contact with Artifact Forging

And so, Qin Lie stayed at Nebula Pavilion.

During the day, he would learn to recognize all sorts of low ranked spirit materials and paid attention to the steps taken by Yao Tai to smelt the spirit materials in his hall.

At night, he would study the artifact forging books, 《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》, and 《Elementary Artifact Forging》 to deepen his knowledge and continue in his attempts to form a whirlpool so he could break through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm.

During this period, he had returned once to Li's Shop and found that it was actually closed; the person in question was also nowhere to be found.

Li Mu only left behind a letter, informing him that he was going out and would only return after two months.

"Qin Lie, how many spirit materials have you committed to memory in my Artifact Forging Hall?" Today, Yao Tai, wearing the appearance of a bird nest hair and an unshaven beard asked, "It's been a month now, and I've told you to remember all the ranks of the spirit materials and categorize them properly. So how is it?"

For the past month, Yao Tai was just busy with his own stuff and frowning everyday. Most of the time he would leave Qin Lie alone and focus on drawing spirit diagrams.

He simply passed Qin Lie a few thick stacks of paper. Written on those papers were countless tiny words densely packed together, describing the in-depth knowledge of all kinds of spirit materials.

"Dragon Bone Jade, Common Grade Three spirit material. Shaped like dragon bones and very solid. When assimilated with an artifact after refinement, it can increase the toughness of said artifact, making it hard to break..."

"Ground Crystal, Common Grade Four spirit material. Yellowish-brown in color, able to connect with earth energy, suitable for spirit artifacts that are used to cultivate earth-type powers. Needs to be complemented with a special spirit diagram to function properly."

"Golden Rhino Horn, Common Grade Three spirit material. The horn of a rhinoceros, golden in color, of incredible toughness and sharpness. Can be used as the main component when forging weapons! When complemented with metallic and sharp materials, its power will be tremendous!"

The special effects of all sorts of spirit materials were clearly written on the stack of papers, and from the looks of these scribbles, they were probably all written by Yao Tai himself.

All these years, Yao Tai had spent a tremendous amount of effort to identify the qualities of all kinds of spirit materials and made records of them.

When it came to artifact forging, Yao Tai's attitude was about as straightforward as it gets. The detailed explanation of the characteristics of spirit materials were all inside those thick stacks of paper—it was the accumulation of over twenty years of his experience.

The 《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》 Qin Lie borrowed from Scripture Tower had only simple drawings of the spirit materials. It was just enough for people to

recognize Dragon Bone Jade, Ground Crystals, Golden Rhino Horns, and other spirit materials on sight, but there were no detailed explanations or details of their purposes for an Artificer.

Therefore, this 《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》 had almost no value in comparison to the thick stacks of paper Yao Tai gave him.

“I’ve almost memorized all of them. I should be able to recognize all the spirit materials in the hall and roughly understand their characteristics.” Qin Lie put down the last stack of paper in his hands as a sincere smile appeared on his face. “It is thanks to your deep love and concern, Great Master, that I was able to have a real in-depth understanding of these spirit materials.”

He knew very well that those thick stacks of papers were the accumulation of Yao Tai’s twenty odd years of artifact forging experience, and they were invaluable to him.

If he were to learn Artifact Forging without these notes and without a teacher to guide him, then he would have to experiment again and again to confirm the characteristics of each and every spirit material.

That was to say that he would have to repeat the years Yao Tai had spent on this path.

“It’s nothing.” Yao Tai waved his hands and carelessly said, “Even if I didn’t tell you about their characteristics, if you were to slowly test them out, given a few years, you would eventually be able to figure all that out anyway. However, if no one is to teach or guide you on the drawings of spirit diagrams, then it will be neigh impossible to master just with basic understanding and experimentation alone...”

“Spirit diagrams are the true essence and core of Artifact Forging. An artifact without a spirit diagram can only be called an ‘artifact’ and not a ‘spirit artifact.’ You must understand this. If you want to become a true Artificer, the process of smelting an artifact itself... is just the foundation. Spirit diagrams are the key.”

“I’m not in a hurry.” Qin Lie chuckled.

In the first place, he hadn’t gone to Yao Tai for spirit diagrams at all. What he wanted to learn was the process of smelting artifacts and not the process of turning an ‘artifact’ into a ‘spirit artifact.’

“Today, you will continue to memorize all the characteristics of every spirit material. I will be forging artifacts tomorrow, and when that happens, you must bring over any spirit materials that I ask for at first notice. You must also make sure that the measurements are precise, and there cannot be even the slightest error!” A distinctively serious look surfaced on Yao Tai’s slightly chubby face.

“No problem.” Qin Lie nodded in agreement. He was also looking forward to it on the inside, hoping to witness the process of Yao Tai forging an artifact.

Once Yao Tai was finished, he began to frown in ponderment again, as if he was thinking about the details of tomorrow’s artifact forging.

On the other hand, Qin Lie was walking back and forth between cupboards which held the spirit materials in the hall, memorizing their respective locations so he could prepare for Yao Tai’s Artifact Forging tomorrow.

“Fatty Yao, can you help take another look at my ‘Mirror of Thousand Illusions’ again? It’s malfunctioning again after you helped me fixed it the last time. Did you really fix it then?”

In the evening, Qin Lie and Yao Tai were busy with their own affairs in the Artifact Forging Hall when, suddenly, they heard a tender shout.

Yao Tai was still calculating the precise number of spirit materials he needed to gather for tomorrow. The moment he heard the voice, his chubby face soured, and he muttered quietly, “What an annoying little girl...”

During this time, there would be some Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners who would look for Yao Tai to repair their broken spirit artifacts.

Every single time these visitors would act respectful and be very careful with their words. They were afraid that if they offended Yao Tai, he would break their spirit artifacts.

So this really was the first person he knew who would insultingly and openly address Yao Tai as ‘Fatty Yao.’

Qin Lie himself was inwardly surprised. He wondered who the newcomer was to cause even Yao Tai a headache.

Very soon, an unruly seventeen to eighteen year old girl, in tight orange clothing, arrived. Her hair was tied in a pair of twin tails, her face was cone-shaped, and her body was shapely and curvaceous. She held a mirror in her hand, and held an accusatory expression as she exclaimed loudly, “Are you capable of fixing this or not? If you’re really can’t, then I’d rather spend some spirit stones to let the Artificers at Armament Pavilion fix this. Every time I use it there’s always a problem; how troublesome.”

“My great grandaunt, Liu Ting, would you please give me a break? When you forged that Mirror of Thousand Illusions, there were a few materials that were inherently incompatible with each other, so it’s naturally going to malfunction more often than usual.” Yao Tai continued with a look of distress, “If you’re looking to fix it at Armament

Pavilion, then just go. Even if I fix it again for you, next time you use it, it will break just as easily, and when that happens, you will just put the blame on me yet again.”

Liu Ting?

Qin Lie’s face flickered, and he couldn’t help but examine this girl who had walked in closely: So she’s Liu Ting...

As of late, he interacted quite a bit with Kang Zhi, Han Feng, and the others, and he had heard them utter the name “Liu Ting” several times. Liu Ting was the daughter of the Vice Pavilion Master, Liu Yuntao. Her talents were extraordinary, and she was already at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, close to breaking through to the Natal Opening Realm.

Kang Zhi’s father, Kang Hui, would often compare him to Liu Ting, and every time he spoke of them, he would complain in an exasperated tone that Kang Zhi could not even compare to another’s girl.

As long as Liu Ting’s realm improved, then Kang Hui would lecture Kang Zhi, claiming that he had embarrassed him. Quite often than not, he would force Kang Zhi into cultivating in seclusion, saying that while he did not expect him to exceed Liu Ting, at the very least he should still be able to catch up to her footsteps.

That was why every time Kang Zhi mentioned Liu Ting, he would not have a single good word to offer. Words like “insolent little brat” and “lowly little girl” would often be common utterances.

“If the materials are incompatible, then why can’t you fix it until they’re not incompatible?” Liu Ting’s eyebrows flew high up as she continued to question aggressively, “You’re just bad, you hear me? If you were truly skilled, then you would be able to resolve even a problem like conflicting materials! You say it like it’s that easy; do you think I don’t need to spend spirit stones to fix things at Armament Pavilion? Seriously, Nebula Pavilion has fed you for so many years and supplied you with so many spirit materials to waste, yet you would shirk from your responsibility at a critical moment. I don’t even know for what are we feeding you for...”

The girl’s expression was impudent, and her tone was quite harsh to say the least. Yao Tai’s face turned colorful from anger, and he came this close to exploding.

On the sidelines, Qin Lie too was frowning inwardly.

“And you? You’re called Qin Lie was it?” You came from some vassal power called Ling Town and even hurt Dou Yang not long ago. I’m really surprised. Do all fellows who rise up from vassal powers these days know no manners at all?”

Liu Ting's brows straightened as she abruptly turned her fire to Qin Lie's head with just as tart a tone.

"First there was a Gao Yu, and now you. Both of you newly promoted bastards are of the same ilk with no concept of your own status at all! And I wonder what those people inside the pavilion are thinking. The rules they make are getting more and more ridiculous. Even fellows who haven't managed to reach the Natal Opening Realm are allowed to enter Nebula Pavilion! Hmph, if my father was in that position, then don't even think that the two of you can just get in so easily!"

"If you have any subordinates who are capable enough to severely injure Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Dewu, to the point he couldn't escape, then we will also allow him to join in straight away."

Zhuo Qian's teasing laughter suddenly rang out at just the right time, and on the final note, she walked right in with her bombastic body. Kang Zhi, Hang Feng, and the others were also following behind her, and they were all looking mockingly at Liu Ting.

"Severely injure Yan Dewu? Him? Like hell I'll believe you!" Liu Ting curled her lips in disdain, but she was less arrogant than before after seeing Zhuo Qian coming towards her.

"It doesn't matter if he did it himself; the point is, it is because of him that Yan Dewu still hasn't been able to leave Shattered Ice Manor's recuperative site." Zhuo Qian smiled seductively. "Since the merit was reported by Ye Yangqiu's subordinate, Liu Yan, there is no mistaking this. If you don't believe it, then you can go look for Ye Yangqiu and reason with him; let's see if the Discipline Hall will listen to you, hmm?"

After that, Zhuo Qian smiled brightly towards Qin Lie and said apologetically, "This sister of yours has been busy solidifying her realm as of late, so I had to dally until now before I could come looking for you. I really hope you don't blame me."

Qin Lie chuckled, "Congratulations, Sister Qian, for breaking through to the Natal Opening Realm."

"And you are late. I thought you would have come to Nebula Pavilion a year ago, but who knew you would've taken this long to arrive."

Zhuo Qian walked forward and, without any regard for the opposite sex, gave Qin Lie a powerful hug. She didn't mind it at all even when her swollen breasts were pressed tightly against Qin Lie's chest.

After letting go, she looked deeply at Qin Lie and said, "About that matter of yours, I've heard about it. You can say that your fiancée's luck has turned around to be able to enter Granny Jiu's sect. You have nothing to be depressed about; Seven Fiends Valley is at the same rank as Dark Asura Hall. With your talent and hard work, as long as you

are alive, I am sure that one day you will be able to honorably reunite with her again and take her in your arms once more!”

A warm feeling bloomed inside Qin Lie’s heart as he smiled and nodded towards her.

“Hmph, the only reason you entered Nebula Pavilion was because you used your connections, and now you wish to enter Dark Asura Hall! Dream on, you fool!” Liu Ting let out a snort with a face full of ridicule. Then, she placed the Mirror of Thousand Illusions on top of a table before rolling her eyes at Yao Tai, saying, “I’ll be coming back for this in seven days. If there are any more problems, then sooner or later, I’ll have my dad fire you!”

And with that, she walked out of the hall.

Chapter 67: Creation on the Spirit Sea

“Jiu Liuyu is the Valley Master of Dark Fiend Valley. She is at the middle stage of the Netherpassage Realm, and her status in Seven Fiends Valley is pretty high. Even her apprentice Lu Li was rumored to have reached the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm. Granny Jiu is usually very picky with her apprentices, so it can be regarded as the Ling Family’s luck that she took a fancy to the Ling sisters.”

Zhuo Qian said while holding a porcelain cup, drinking and speaking in her elegant multi-leveled house at Nebula Pavilion.

Qin Lie, Kang Zhi, Zhu Peng, Han Feng, and the others were all having their meal inside the house, surrounding a table full of dishes. Everyone was present except for Tu Ze, who was still in seclusion.

The day gradually turned dark.

Crystal gems were embedded on the walls and pillars, illuminating the interior of the room with bright lights. Zhuo Qian wore loose silk pajamas, and a large amount of white skin was showing at the collar area, causing everyone else to feel incredibly restless. They had shifty eyes that wanted to get a better glimpse yet were afraid of the repercussions.

Zhuo Qian didn’t mind them. She simply looked towards Qin Lie and consoled, “Granny Jiu has always been a proud person. She treats the cultivation of her apprentices with great care, so the Ling sisters are lucky to be able to enter her tutelage. Qin Lie, you’re still young, and although you may not be able to rank among forces like Seven Fiends Valley or Dark Asura Hall right now, it doesn’t mean that you don’t have a chance in the future.”

Her beautiful face was riddled with seriousness, “To be honest, I don’t know you very well, but I feel that... there’s something special about you. Qin Lie, Seven Fiends Valley

isn't as unattainable as it looks. If you give it your all, then one day you'll be able to enter that kind of force as well."

"That's right Qin Lie, you're in Nebula Pavilion right now aren't you? If you go one step higher, then it'll be Dark Asura Hall already. Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valleys are friendly with each other and there are always opportunities for them to get together for missions. If you enter Dark Asura Hall, then you will have the chance to reunite with your fiancée," Kang Zhi also consoled.

Zhu Peng, Han Feng, and the rest too took their turns to serve him a drink and console him.

Qin Lie never stopped smiling, and every time he accepted a cup, he would down the entire contents in a single gulp without a drop left behind.

He knew that the reason Zhuo Qian set up a feast here was all for his sake, hoping that she could help untie the knots in his heart and that the incident with the Ling Family would not affect his cultivation on the martial way.

He saw it all with his eyes, and felt warmed inside his heart.

The liquor feast lasted until midnight before they finally dispersed. Qin Lie too said his goodbyes and returned to his little house close to Zhuo Qian's.

He sat by the window inside the dark room. Not only was his mind not affected by the alcohol, he was growing more and more sober.

He wondered if it was because he drank Li Mu's strong wine and was gradually affected by it. Today's fine liquor tasted as bland as water and completely tasteless. It completely failed to intoxicate him at all.

"Lu Li of the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm, Jiu Liuyu of the middle stage of the Netherpassage Realm, Valley Master of Dark Fiend Valley, Black Iron rank force..."

Gazing at the mottled moonlight beneath a tree outside the window, he whispered while lifting a frown. Then, he settled himself, focused his mind into a state of meditation, and slowly closed his eyes. He began focusing on gathering a whirlpool inside his dantian's spirit sea.

After an hour, his attempt had failed yet again as his spirit sea clustered and spirit clouds dissipated.

"It's been over a month. I've been trying to gather a whirlpool every night, and yet I could not succeed even a single time. The ascension from the eighth level of Refinement to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm is as expected... far more

difficult than it was before. The main problem is that there isn't a clue or even a ray of hope to be found. Have I made a mistake somewhere?"

He was beginning to suspect that it was indeed the case and sat there pondering, trying to find a new direction to head towards.

"The ninth level of the Refinement Realm, gather a whirlpool in my dantian's spirit sea. Whirlpool, whirlpool..."

The moment Qin Lie's heart was disturbed, his mind became jumbled with all kinds of thoughts. He then thought of his spirit diagram inscriptions and started considering if he should set the current matter aside and refocus his energy on inscribing instead.

"The Spirit Gathering diagram, the Amplification diagram, the Spirit Storage diagram, the Strengthening diagram..."

Bits and pieces of the four complex and mysterious spirit diagrams, appeared in his head. He frowned in ponderment, thinking in silence.

"The Spirit Gathering diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram! That's also a whirlpool, isn't it?!"

Suddenly, there was a flash of inspiration, and his eyes abruptly turned bright. An uncontrollable thought began to bloom in his mind — what would happen if he tried inscribing a Spirit Gathering diagram in his dantian's spirit sea?

To this day, out of the four spirit diagrams, the only one that he had mastered completely was the Spirit Gathering diagram.

He had spent an endless amount of energy and broken hundreds of spirit tablets on the Spirit Gathering diagram. His deep understanding of the Spirit Gathering diagram had enabled him to reach the level where he could draw its networks with perfect precision!

From a broad point of view, the Spirit Gathering diagram would vaguely appear to be in the shape of a whirlpool. The spirit lines on the outside formed many circles of their own and they all shrank towards the inside like a screw or a standing funnel...

Spirit Gathering, Spirit Gathering... Only a vortex shape could more easily gather and attract spirit energy, and if you think about it closely, isn't the Spirit Gathering diagram in the shape of a whirlpool?

With his spirit energy acting as the lines, his dantian's spirit sea acting as the spirit tablet, and his mind consciousness acting as the moving pen, could he inscribe a Spirit Gathering diagram out?

The moment this thought was born, he could not suppress it any longer!

Qin Lie closed his eyes again and fell into a meditative state inside the dark room. His mind consciousness dove into his dantian's spirit sea, and once again, he was met with the sight of the vast spirit sea...

Amidst the vast sea and clouds, his spirit energy was the clouds, and they filled every corner in his dantian and flowed in accordance with his thoughts.

His wisp of consciousness was like a drawing pen and a rope. Brimming with spirit energy, it began sketching an outline in midair and directed the flow of spirit energy in this vast land into clear spirit lines...

He began drawing the Spirit Gathering diagram he was most familiar with inside his dantian's spirit sea and became completely fixated on the task.

At this moment, if there was someone who could enter his dantian's spirit sea, they would be astonished to discover that the normally scattered and disorderly spirit energy was now seemingly tied into twisting lines.

These lines flowed about like a snake, leaving clear lines in the vast world of his dantian. The tracks grew more and more numerous, sometimes crisscrossing each other, sometimes connecting between the head and tail, and sometimes sliding in parallel...

Vaguely, a stereoscopic Spirit Gathering diagram was gradually formed inside his dantian!

Throughout the process he made no mistakes, and every spirit thread was aligned with maximum precision!

Finally, the gathered spirit energy and clumped out clouds no longer showed any signs of dissipation!

He had done it in one go!

"Boom!"

The moment the Spirit Gathering diagram was formed, the strange sounds of spirit energy expanding began to come from inside Qin Lie's dantian's spirit sea. In the next moment, the Spirit Gathering diagram began to spin faster and faster like a real vortex.

Qin Lie's mind consciousness was immediately swept out, and he could no longer detect the situation inside his dantian's spirit sea.

However, he could feel that a storm had begun inside his dantian's spirit sea, and it was undergoing an amazing transformation that he could not predict the outcome of!

He could not see it with his mind, but he could feel it with his body. He vaguely felt that the Spirit Gathering diagram he had drawn inside his dantian's spirit sea was automatically corrected by a small degree by his dantian's spirit sea to the optimum state, the state that was most suitable for his dantian's spirit sea!

His dantian became more and more painful, but his eyes grew brighter and brighter!

On the outside, the mottled moonlight beneath the tree had turned into daylight. The night had passed away quietly, and a new day had long since arrived.

He was not bothered by the passage of time at all, and he continued to concentrate and slowly experience even the slightest changes inside his dantian's spirit sea...

When the sun hung high in the sky, his mind consciousness that had been swept away was finally allowed to enter his dantian's spirit sea once more.

He could finally see what had happened inside.

There was a hurricane-like whirlpool that was situated inside the spirit clouds within his dantian's spirit sea. The vortex's structure appeared similar to the Spirit Gathering diagram, yet it had a few differences of its own. It was as if it was corrected by the natural guidance of his dantian's spirit sea so that it would turn into a state most suitable for it...

The vortex sat in the center of his dantian's spirit sea. The moment he gathered his strength, the vortex would spin and suck in the clusters of spirit clouds.

Through continuous spinning and continuous tempering, the vortex caused the spirit energy to turn impossibly refined and even more condensed than before!

Qin Lie's eyes were incomparably bright, and his body was also slightly shuddering; a look of ecstasy appeared on his face.

He suddenly remembered his grandfather's words many years ago.

"A spirit diagram is the core of artifacts, but do you know where spirit diagrams come from? It is rumored that the very first spirit diagram was the result of a strong expert perceiving the laws of the world, capturing nature's network, polishing, and inscribing upon his own experiences. After billions of attempts, it slowly evolved to what it is right now.

"The strongest and most mysterious spirit diagrams were not created out of thin air. They were cultivated from the hands of heaven by following the laws of nature and observing the world's supreme principles.

“Everything in the world, from the famous mountains and great rivers, to the vast and endless galaxy, are actually all filled with spirit diagrams. The celestial bodies in the sky are spirit diagrams, and their orbits are the flow of the spirit lines. When you look at this world from the sky, you will realize that the rivers are spirit lines, the mountain ranges are also spirit lines, and the earth itself is a spirit diagram.

“The meridians in a martial practitioner’s body is also a spirit diagram, and the nerves in our brains is the most complex and mysterious spirit diagram of them all. If you look carefully, then you will see that spirit diagrams exist everywhere in the world!

“If someone could completely grasp the world’s natural laws and its changes, then Artificers would be able to create a completely new spirit diagram that contains the supreme principles themselves! Now that is the truth zenith of spirit diagrams! The ancient sages of the past, the very first Artificers, the most complex and wondrous spirit diagrams, they all exist because of this!

“True spirit diagrams, are the supreme principles and the laws of the world. This was simply the same with the cultivation of the martial way!”

Back in those days, Qin Shan would often talk about some ridiculously convoluted topics while he was cultivating until he was completely confused, and no matter how hard he tried, he just could not make heads or tails of it.

A few years had passed, and when he recalled Qin Shan’s words once more, they had finally played their due role!

At this moment, Qin Lie finally realized why Qin Shan would often soliloquize and say all those things that sounded completely alien to him when he was cultivating.

Qin Shan was forcefully implanting the essence of his deepest experiences right into his head!

And it was only on this day, this very moment, that he finally realized it!

“All things are diagrams, and the supreme principles are interconnected!”

Qin Lie exclaimed in a low tone, and his face radiated with a kind of new found glory. It was as if he had suddenly understood a deep truth.

“It’s not that Grandpa didn’t teach me anything; it’s just that he had already told me the most important things since a long time ago. How laughable I am to not have understood this until now.”

Chapter 68: Study

“Qin Lie, three ounces of Quicksand Gold, quick!”

“Qin Lie! Three Ground Crystals!”

“Qin Lie! Mystical Cold Jade, two sticks!”

“Qin Lie!”

In the Artifact Forging Hall, Yao Tai sweated up a storm as he hurried around the smelting furnace and continuously shouted.

The flame formed by dozens of fire crystals in the smelting furnace blazed a crimson red, and waves of the inferno rose high up into the air, causing the temperature inside the hall to become astoundingly high.

Yao Tai continuously broke apart spirit materials as his eyes locked onto the smelting furnace, keeping track of how long each material had been inside for. He kept watch over the changes in spirit materials inside and put spirit materials into the furnace as he continuously directed Qin Lie to fetch the spirit materials he needed.

In the hall, Qin Lie’s clothing was soaked as he flew from corner to corner and collected the materials Yao Tai specified.

The floor was covered with spirit materials beside the furnace. Many of the materials had been broken up and ground into powder to mix with other spirit materials on the outside.

As the interior of the furnace changed, the materials needed would also change, and the amount of each spirit material needed would need to be readjusted accordingly.

—When using the furnace, every slight change would cause the steps after it to change, and this would directly affect the spirit materials.

The heat of the fire crystals, the surface area of the furnace, how much the spirit materials merged, the conflict between spirit materials, how intense the fire was...

There were too many factors to be considered when an artifact was being smelted, and all of them had to be considered as a minuscule mistake could cause the smelting to fail and render all previous efforts worthless.

Qin Lie continuously moved about and acquired the exact amount of every spirit material that Yao Tai called out. Each time he handed spirit materials over to Yao Tai, they were the exact amount that Yao Tai had requested, not off in the slightest.

—The inscribing of spirit diagrams were even stricter in their requirements of accuracy than smelting artifacts!

If any spirit lines varied in width by even a hair's breadth, they could cause the entire spirit diagram to crumble and cause the inscription of the rest of the spirit diagram to fail.

Due to this, Qin Lie had practiced his precision to an extreme degree!

Earlier today, by relying on inscribing a Spirit Gathering diagram in his spirit sea, he successfully formed a whirlpool and broke through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm.

Now that the spirit sea whirlpool had formed, if he channeled spirit energy to cultivate, the whirlpool would also start to spin and assist him in purifying spirit energy.

Through the breakthrough in his cultivation this time, he had gained a new understanding on artifact forging and the martial way. His mind, which had been wavering all this time, also steadied itself.

Before, he had always been uncertain between the martial way and artifact forging.

There were several times where he wanted to give up on pursuing artifact forging and throw himself completely into growing his martial abilities to breakthrough into higher realms as soon as possible, in hopes that he could enter Dark Asura Hall faster and reunite with Ling Yushi.

He had originally presumed his immersion into artifact forging would affect his cultivation and slow his progression.

Only yesterday, did he finally rest his heart after he had his insight and the inscription of the Spirit Gathering diagram had solved the perplexing problem that he had struggled with for a long time, helping him enter the ninth level of the Refinement Realm.

“For a powerful martial practitioner to become a skilled artificer is a difficult matter, almost impossible.”

“Yet, it is an easy matter for an artificer that has deep knowledge of spirit diagrams to become a powerful martial practitioner. There are almost no thresholds or barriers!”

“Many powerful artificers are the most powerful martial practitioners, high level existences that have a complete understanding of the deeper laws of the martial way!”

Grandpa had once said this to him. He had not paid it any attention before but now held it as the truth!

Due to this, he finally made his decision on whether or not he should continue on with artifact forging.

Yao Tai was his first teacher on this path, the first person that could truly help him learn, so he put his all into studying.

“As of now we have to wait for the spirit materials to become completely melded together. Then, we slowly form the shape of the artifact after setting it in the mold.”

They worked heavily until dusk when Yao Tai finally shouted to stop and dropped down to sit next to the furnace. He wiped his sweat away as he looked with glowing eyes at the furnace and talked.

It had been many hours since Qin Lie had rested. At this time, he was almost on the verge of collapsing. He sat down next to Yao Tai and asked, “What do we do after this?”

Yao Tai turned his head around, and a thread of joy showed on his slightly plump face as he praised, “You are more attentive than all those before you. Just by yourself, you were better than two or three of them combined!”

When he spoke of this, he snorted, “The people before, followed me for a few years but wouldn’t have done as well as you. When I had them retrieve materials for me, they rarely were as accurate as I required which necessitated me to measure amounts myself, wasting my forging time!”

Over the past two decades, there had been seven or eight people that had been Yao Tai’s assistants who helped him retrieve the materials.

Even after a year or two, they would still make mistakes when measuring materials. For example, when getting three ounces of Quicksand Gold, they would have a tiny bit more. To them, this little bit was nothing, but little did they know that this minuscule bit would cause the smelting process to change.

A single change would produce even more changes, creating a butterfly effect which would result in the entire artifact forging process failing.

It was the first time Yao Tai had worked with Qin Lie, and he did not have high expectations before this. He had felt that Qin Lie would be like the previous apprentices and make numerous mistakes in the beginning. Successive mistakes at the busiest times would greatly decrease how quickly he could work and even prompt outright failure.

The result was that Qin Lie’s shocking accuracy, his grasp on spirit materials, and his fast reaction speed all induced Yao Tai to sigh in shock.

Because Qin Lie had completely exceeded his expectations in every category, the preliminary smelting that he had thought would only be completed tomorrow was completed this evening. This greatly surpassed his predictions.

He was very satisfied with Qin Lie and found him easy to work with.

“This boy... is definitely a genius.” Yao Tai narrowed his eyes and examined Qin Lie as he thought.

“What do we do after this?” Qin Lie asked again.

“There is a mold under the furnace. When the substance slowly settles, it will form the preliminary form of the artifact.” Yao Tai had a slight smile as he explained seriously. “After it cools, it will become a rough artifact, and then it is time to polish the artifact to make it look more exquisite. Next is to add jewels and spirit materials to the material to increase the artifact’s power in specific areas, and lastly... is inscribing spirit diagrams for the artifact.”

Qin Lie listened carefully. He felt that he had learned much today. Even though it was extremely busy, he had learned much more today.

Only today did he experience artifact forging first hand and obtained a clear grasp on the process.

When he came to the Artifact Forging Hall on the second day, he saw that the furnace fire had been extinguished long ago.

He went to look and found that there was a groove under the furnace. There were different molds placed in the specialized groove. If one was to forge spirit artifacts like blades or swords, then they would put in molds for blades or swords, an axe mold for an axe type artifact... and so on.

What Yao Tai was forging now was a hammer. That mold was still there, but the rough hammer was in Yao Tai’s hand. He was using sandpaper to grind the uneven surface to smoothen it...

Qin Lie watched silently.

Yao Tai first smoothed out the surface of the hammer and then inlaid three earth-colored crystals at the handle. He said, “This is a Heavenly Cloud Crystal, a Common Grade Six spirit material. This is the finishing touch. It can turn spirit energy into cloud. When used with the spirit diagram, it can cause this hammer to create grey clouds when it is swung and is very suitable for people who cultivate the Great Wave Art.”

Yao Tai introduced each step to Qin Lie as he worked. He only seemed to be finishing up when the sky was turning dark and he had inlaid the three Heavenly Cloud Crystals into the hammer.

“The last step is also the most important step. Naturally, it is inscribing spirit diagrams and actually setting down the artifact’s grade and level!”

Yao Tai's plump face smiled as he said, "This step is too far away for you and too profound. It is not something you can learn in a short period of time. Mn, starting tomorrow, I need to inscribe spirit diagrams and need it to be quiet, so you do not need to come in for the next five days, you can rest."

"Okay." Qin Lie was not chatty and nodded to show his understanding.

From the mouths of Kang Zhi, Han Feng, and the others, he already knew that Yao Tai thought of his spirit diagrams as his life and definitely would not easily pass them to others.

So when it was time to inscribe spirit diagrams for artifacts, he would habitually let his assistants go on holiday and would not allow anyone to enter the Artifact Forging Hall or disturb him.

Qin Lie had been prepared for this, so he openly accepted it and left the hall easily.

Yao Tai was slightly surprised. After Qin Lie left, his brow creased as he muttered, "Strange boy, he didn't even ask once, and didn't even show any intention of requesting to stay. Mn, it might just be because he is starting out and can suppress it for now, I wonder if he will remain the same in the future..."

He gazed at the doorway and thoughtfully rubbed his chin as he said, "I hope this one can stay a bit longer. Even if he is more cunning, even if he came for the spirit diagrams, at the very least, this boy is really easy to use."

.....

Sent on holiday by Yao Tai, Qin Lie suddenly relaxed and had thought about going to Li's Shop.

When he went to Li's Shop the next day, it was still as empty as usual, and Li Mu didn't seem to have returned.

That was fine with him since he had the key. He went to the little room and silently sat down.

Presently, he had reached the ninth level of the Refinement Realm. If he cultivated, the whirlpool inside the spirit sea of his dantian would spin and help him refine spirit energy. When all of the spirit energy in his dantian was refined, he could then start preparing to breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm.

He had put down the inscribing of the Amplification diagram for a long time. That was the reason why he had come to Li's Shop, to take his days off as a chance to continue his practice of the Amplification diagram.

“It has been so long since I could finally calm down. I hope that this time is better and that I succeed in the next five days.”

He took out the first spirit tablet and studied the Amplification diagram in his mind before taking a deep breath and putting his finger on the tablet.

The moment his finger landed, he completely became silent and was unable to hear any sound.

It was as though the only things left in this world was him, the spirit tablet in his hand, and the world inside the spirit tablet.

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Chapter 69 - In One Go

Commerce Street. Inside Li's Shop, Qin Lie had one finger pressed against the spirit tablet. His mind and consciousness floated listless, and his spirit energy shot around like electric currents.

It had been more than a month since he last practiced inscribing spirit diagrams, yet the moment he started, not only did he not feel rusty at all, he even felt a kind of unspeakable joy. The practiced coordination of his mind and spirit energy worked with had actually reached a completely new level as the spirit line was inscribed.

The entire world even felt silent.

In his eyes, the only world he could sense was the Amplification spirit diagram inside the spirit tablet.

There was nothing else.

Now this was infatuation!

—This was his infatuation towards spirit diagrams. Only by being obsessed to the point of insanity, would it allow an Artificer to enter this wondrous state.

It was as if his mind and consciousness, his soul, his five senses, and his emotions were all pinned into the world inside the spirit diagram, causing him to forget the real world itself.

At this moment, it was as if he had become a ghost inside the spirit diagram. Whenever his soul made a move, the spirit lines responded in kind and surged forward. The Amplification spirit diagram's network was undergoing a distinct/clear change...

Without almost any pauses or taking notice of the passage of time - forgetting oneself completely - the Amplification spirit diagram began to rapidly form.

Mustering his strength, he controlled his spirit energy with his mind and soul and drew a perfect Amplification spirit diagram within the spirit tablet's world.

All in one go.

Suddenly, the tablet in his hands glowed with a misty blue light. The tablet itself had become as clear as crystal, its textures translucent, almost as if the material itself had undergone a change.

Qin Lie withdrew the tablet, performed a slight check, and discovered that he had expended only about half of his mind and spirit energy.

He felt hungry and, at the same time, saw that it was already dark outside. He did not know how long he had spent on drawing the Amplification spirit diagram but felt really comfortable all the way to the bones.

For the first time, he realized that inscribing spirit diagrams could actually be such an enjoyable matter.

He felt joy and obtained mental satisfaction from the process, both his body and heart feeling delighted.

This was in itself a kind of ascension in realm.

From the moment his finger touched the spirit diagram, he clearly realized that as he resumed practicing spirit diagram inscription after a month and a half's gap, not only did he not regress at all, he had even miraculously improved in the art of inscribing spirit diagrams...

"Sometimes, by setting something aside first and calming your heart, diverting your attention somewhere else, and forgetting it momentarily, you'll often find some unexpected rewards when you pick it up again and resume."

He suddenly remembered Li Mu's words from before, as his eyes gradually turned brighter.

More than a month ago, he was not able to break through in his attempts to draw the Amplification spirit diagram no matter what, and had encountered a bottleneck.

He had practiced again and again, yet his attempts were met with repeated failures. He slowly became irritated, and it caused even more frequent mistakes in his future attempts to the point where even a lot of beginner mistakes were starting to crop up, making him even more agitated.

While he stubbornly continued on his task, Li Mu had come over and told him that he could transfer his attention elsewhere, to try and take a break for the moment and focus his efforts somewhere else.

Li Mu had shown him the path, directing him to Nebula Pavilion to apply to be assigned under Yao Ta, to first learn the most basic parts of artifact forging.

He put down his drawings and listened to his words.

At Nebula Pavilion, not only had he successfully broken through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, he had also truly grasped all the steps of smelting artifacts into shape, learning to recognize many the characteristics and effects of numerous low level spirit materials.

Now that he had returned to Li's Shop and restarted his practice on inscribing Amplification spirit diagrams, to his surprise, he realized that after more than a month's break, that not only had his drawings not turned rusty, he instead made a most delightful improvement, even completing the Amplification spirit diagram he had repeatedly failed to inscribe in one go.

"Uncle Li's advice was actually unbelievably effective. It resolved the many problems that confounded me all in one go!" Within the small room, surprise flowed out of Qin Lie's eyes, and while rubbing the spirit tablet with one hand, he thought, "If Uncle Li's outlooks are so unique, then he probably... is a lot more than he looks."

"Creeaak!"

Suddenly, there was the sound of the door opening from the front yard, and Qin Lie abruptly woke up from his dormancy.

"Who is it?" Qin Lie exclaimed in a low tone.

"Who else? Of course it's me, your Uncle Li." Li Mu's lazy voice rang over from the courtyard. "When I came back earlier, you were absorbed in drawing spirit diagrams, so I didn't disturb you and went to take a short nap."

The moment he recognized Li Mu's voice, Qin Lie relaxed and went out of the small room while holding his newly inscribed spirit tablet.

It was already night, and under the bright moonlight, with his hands behind his back, Li Mu stood at the courtyard together with that snow white wolfdog. Its beastly eyes seemed to be richly filled with wisdom, shone with a strange glow that was akin to moonlight; it caused one to feel that it was even more intelligent than humans.

"Thank you, Uncle Li!" The moment he got out, Qin Lie immediately bowed with respect towards Li Mu and sincerely thanked him. "Thanks to Uncle Li's advice from before, I've

gained quite a lot. Because I have listened to your words, not only I have broken through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, I have also successfully inscribed the Amplification spirit diagram. Furthermore, I have learned from Yao Tai valuable knowledge on artifact smelting.”

Li Mu waved his hands with a smile to indicate there’s no need to be so polite, then said, “Since you’re out now, why don’t you join Uncle Li for a little drink. Oh, there are no dishes today, so we’ll have to make do. Hm, look, the moonlight is quite good today, we’ll be taking it as our drinking dish for the night, haha.”

He gestured Qin Lie to sit down at a stone bench. From his bosom he took out a exquisitely made shot cup and poured one for Qin Lie and one more for that big wolfdog.

“Ever since I’ve drank Uncle Li’s liquor, I wonder why anything else I drink all felt tasteless to me.” Qin Lie did not act modest either, as he sat down with a smile and immediately took a small sip from the cup. As he tasted the burning sensation in his mouth, he could not help but exclaim in pleasure.

“Haha, you little fella, was actually a little drunkard too!” Uncle Li laughed heartily before saying in half-jest, “Still, it is better if you cast away this idea. To drink, you are drinking a kind of mood, and doesn’t have much to do with the alcohol itself. Besides, Uncle Li’s liquor isn’t something that you can find anywhere on the streets, so if you came to love my liquor and only mine, then all future alcoholic drinks will seem tasteless to you. You will never be able to experience the joy of drinking again.”

“I have received your guidance” Qin Lie answered in thought.

“Come, let me see your newly forged spirit tablet.” Li Mu extended his hands.

Qin Lie handed it over.

After receiving the spirit tablet with the Amplification spirit diagram inscribed in it, Li Mu narrowed his eyes slightly, as though closely examining it.

After a while, he nodded to himself before returning the spirit tablet to Qin Lie, saying, “Amplification spirit diagrams are usually used to complement other spirit diagrams. A single Amplification spirit diagram alone will not be able to display its true wonders. Mn, you can try drawing a spirit gathering spirit diagram and an amplification spirit diagram on the same tablet. Only then will you know the true effects of the Amplification spirit diagram.”

“Uncle Li must know artifact forging, right?” Qin Lie asked in surprise.

Shaking his head, Li Mu amusedly said, “I really do not know how to forge artifacts. I am not an Artificer, but the things that go through my hands are often somewhat diverse,

and I have used some spirit artifacts and thus have a bit of knowledge in this area. But if you really want me to draw a spirit diagram, heheh, I won't be able to inscribe even the simplest diagram. Every field has a master; and since I have never studied this particular field seriously, I really am not as knowledgeable as you think I am in artifact forging."

"You said that every field has a master, so... which field do you specialize in, Uncle Li?" Qin Lie asked tentatively.

"Opening a store and doing business, of course." Uncle Li laughed.

Seeing that he wasn't willing to talk more on this subject, Qin Lie curled his lips and did not pursue it any further.

"Hehe, come, let's drink, drink some more. It doesn't matter if you get drunk, you'll recover after a good night of sleep anyway." Uncle Li personally served him a full cup and said smilingly, "Tomorrow, try inscribing both a Spirit Gathering and an Amplification spirit diagram together, and see if it can enhance that Spirit Gathering Board's effect to gather the spirit energy of the world. I believe your Amplification spirit diagram should be able to create quite the effect too; even Uncle Li here is looking forward to it a little."

"Okay." Qin Lie let himself go and began drinking, and before long, he had drunk himself into a mush and lay on the stone table unconscious.

He was entirely out cold, but Uncle Li and that big wolfdog continued to drink freely, as if they were completely unaffected by that liquor's killer effects.

It was at this moment that the big wolfdog's intelligent eyes glanced at Qin Lie, then suddenly at Li Mu with doubt leaking out of its eyes. It was as if it was asking Li Mu why he would bother wasting energy on someone like Qin Lie.

"I may not know how to forge an artifact, but I have come across quite a lot of spirit artifacts in the past and naturally just as many spirit diagrams. The two basic spirit diagrams he possesses, 'Spirit Gathering' and 'Amplification,' are the most complex ones I've ever seen. They are at least ten times more complicated than any other Spirit Gathering and Amplification spirit diagram, or even a little more than that."

Li Mu smiled while slowly shaking his glass, narrowing his eyes as he lazily said, "Perhaps an extraordinary artificer has come into existence right before my very eyes, and under my tutelage too. Hehe, this is actually quite the interesting and accomplishing matter. If this artificer can grow up to become a great martial practitioner in the end - then that will make me even happier."

Chapter 70: Combining Spirit Diagrams

Blue lights flashed repeatedly on top of the spirit tablet, illuminating the small house with blurry lights.

Qin Lie's expression was focused, and it was as if there were many tiny arcs of electricity flashing across his eyes. The tip of his finger was as white as the gleam of a needle while he drew a complex and delicate diagram inside the spirit tablet.

Sweat drops were slowly appearing on his forehead, and the veins on his neck were incredibly distinct. But at the same time, he was also incredibly excited.

To combine a spirit diagram and inscribe the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram and Amplification spirit diagram on top of a spirit tablet, and to use the Amplification spirit diagram to enhance the effects of the spirit gathering... He was really looking forward to the results.

Tiny gleams like electricity swam all about the world inside the spirit diagram, and they drew many lines of beautiful orbits to form the network of a spirit diagram.

The Amplification spirit diagram was shrunk several times its original size and embedded inside the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram. A few hub-like spirit lines began connecting the two spirit diagrams together...

"Boom!"

Abruptly, the two spirit diagrams glowed and released a brilliant light simultaneously. As the final stroke was completed, the originally two separate spirit diagrams merged together in perfect unison.

A perfect whole.

A stream of spirit energy was poured into it. At first, it spun rapidly inside the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram, then it was directed towards the Amplification spirit diagram and activated it as well, causing both spirit diagrams to instantly come to life and emit a magnificent radiance.

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh!"

An extremely focused Qin Lie caught hold of the natural spirit artifact's silent fluctuations. He suddenly felt that the air he was breathing had turned fresh and clean, and it even seemed to smell of forest nature.

Inside the shop, Li Mu had lazily curled on a recliner and narrowed his eyes at the sunlight shining in from outside, passively conducting business.

Suddenly, his brows jumped as if he had found something interesting.

Throwing the thought of business out of his mind, he immediately got off the recliner and turned towards the backyard. When he arrived at Qin Lie's small door, he asked loudly, "How is it? Did it work?"

"I think it did." Qin Lie scratched his head and answered uncertainly, "Uncle Li, why don't you take a look and see... if it works?"

Li Mu was inwardly surprised, because merging two spirit diagrams together was a task easier said than done.

Qin Lie had begun experimenting when he gave his advice on that night three days ago.

Just as Li Mu had predicted, during the early stages Qin Lie had failed repeatedly and wasted many spirit tablets; he did not manage to put them together even a single time.

The merging of two spirit diagrams challenges an Artificer's creativity to its limits. It was incredibly difficult to find the right focal point.

In his mind, Li Mu predicted that Qin Lie would take at least ten days to half a month before he eventually discovered the key to success. He had never expected him to successfully merge the two spirit diagrams so quickly.

"Let me see." Li Mu extended his palm and accepted the shining, crystal clear spirit tablet before focusing his mind to examine it.

Inside the spirit tablet, the Amplification spirit diagram had been shrunk several times its original size and embedded within the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram. While spirit energy flowed inside the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram, the Amplification spirit diagram was displaying its effects as well. It seemed to be supporting the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram from behind by increasing the speed at which the spirit energy spun inside the spirit diagram and enhanced the core.

Li Mu nodded to himself and waited while still touching the spirit tablet, waiting for a change in nature's spirit energy.

Fifteen minutes later, his eyes brightened slightly as he looked towards Qin Lie and said, "Normally, your Spirit Gathering Board can only enhance how quickly one can gather nature's spirit energy by a quarter, but after the addition of the Amplification spirit diagram, this enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Board can increase the gathering rate by half. That is double the spirit gathering effects!"

"Is that good or bad?" Qin Lie asked anxiously.

Li Mu looked at him in surprise, “Kid, did you know that if that an Amplification spirit diagram can be considered pretty good if it can enhance other effects by two to three tenths and that a spirit diagram that can enhance other effects by five to six tenths would be considered extraordinary? Your spirit diagram doubles the effects entirely, so why don’t you tell me whether it is good or bad.”

“Then it’s pretty good.” Qin Lie nodded and genuinely laughed.

“This is more than just pretty good. In fact, this is incredibly extraordinary.” Holding the spirit tablet, Li Mu gave it another thought before saying, “Of course, I’ve also seen Amplification spirit diagrams that could double or even triple the other effects, though the scenario was quite different from yours.”

“What kind of scenario?” Qin Lie asked curiously.

“If the materials that formed an artifact was extraordinary in the first place and could be considered a world’s treasure and the forging process was also ingenious and impeccable, then naturally the inscribed Amplification spirit diagram would also be much more potent! But of course, this scenario is heavily reliant on the artifact’s components itself, and only the best and most valuable of materials can increase the potency of the amplification effects.”

Looking at him, Li Mu smiled and explained, “In addition, what you’re using right now is just a spirit tablet. It is the most basic material to practice inscribing spirit diagrams, and it cannot even be considered an ‘artifact.’ Since it still can double the potency of effects, this is already quite exceptional in my eyes. Yes, if we exclude the materials and talk about the Amplification spirit diagram alone, the one you’ve mastered now is probably the most amazing diagram I’ve ever seen.”

After a pause, Li Mu then continued, “Let me put it this way. If you are able to draw your Amplification spirit diagram on a spirit artifact that’s tempered by a worldly treasure, then it is likely that the amplification effects of your Amplification spirit diagram will probably reach up to three or even four times its potency and exceed even those spirit artifacts that I’ve seen!”

“In short, I did a great job?” Qin Lie smiled cheerfully.

“Alright that’s it, just how else do you want me to praise you, kid?” Li Mu scoffed once before continuing, “Hum, it’s about time you return to Nebula Pavilion. You can continue to stay and learn from Yao Tai; it will be very beneficial for you. This Yao Tai fellow improved very slowly because he did not have a good spirit diagram, but even then his foundation is incredibly solid. He has been smelting artifacts for over twenty years, so his understanding and mastery on heating and mixing low level spirit materials is incredibly seasoned and skillful. You won’t go wrong studying under him.”

“Uncle Li, you seem to be quite close with Yao Tai?” Qin Lie asked in surprise.

“Not at all. It’s just that I’ve heard quite a bit about him, so it doesn’t take much to guess his situation.” Li Mu smiled a little. “I will be around the shop as of late, so you can come anytime to practice drawing spirit diagrams when you’re free. Yes, when you’re at Nebula Pavilion, you should also spend more time cultivating martial arts. You’re at a critical point right now, so there’s no harm in paying more attention to it. Who knows, you may be able to enter the Natal opening Realm very soon.”

“Got it. Thank you Uncle Li, I’ll be going in a while then.”

“Mn.”

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When evening had arrived, Qin Lie left Li’s Shop and headed towards the South City of Nebula Pavilion.

Between Commerce Street and South City is a long and wide river. A few bridges are set between them to enable the people of South City to go to and fro from Commerce Street.

Li’s Shop was situated at a remote location in Commerce Street. There was a stone bridge that connected from here to South City, and it was also equally deserted with almost no traffic at all.

Qin Lie had always walked back and forth through this stone bridge.

Today, when he had stepped on the stone bridge, he was still thinking about the combination of the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram and Amplification spirit diagram.

Suddenly, a slightly chilly presence appeared from a person in front of him, whose back was facing Qin Lie, causing him to wake from his thoughts.

When he had walked on the bridge, he already saw that person at the center of the bridge. He was leaning against the sides with his head was facing towards South City as if in deep thought. Qin Lie hadn’t thought much about it and simply treated him as a pedestrian, but now he felt that something was off.

“Long time no see, Qin Lie. Do you still remember me?”

The person turned around and grinned at Qin Lie. His white teeth seemed to emit a terrible chill.

“Yan Qingsong?” Qin Lie’s expression tensed, but on the inside he wasn’t too worried.

Yan Qingsong was at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm and one step away from reaching the Natal Opening Realm. But that was it; he hadn’t broken through to the next

Realm. Now that he had just entered the ninth level of the Refinement Realm himself, he had no fear for this person at all.

“And me too.”

A cold voice rang out from behind him. Before he knew it, a figure had already stood at the other end of the bridge and blocked his path back to Commerce Street.

When Qin Lie turned around and took one glance at the person, his expression changed slightly, and he finally turned apprehensive on the inside.

The person behind him was Feng Kai, Feng Yi’s brother, and he was at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm!

“Hehe, I’ve had people watching you for a while now.” Yan Qingsong lifted a small smile. “During the time you were at Nebula Pavilion, we couldn’t find an opportunity. But when we saw you enter Li’s shop a few days ago, we guessed that you would definitely return to Nebula Pavilion later. We’ve waited for you for a few days, and finally, you’re here.”

“My younger brother’s arm was bitten off by a Silver Winged Demon Wolf. The Feng Family clansmen suffered a terrible loss. Feng Lun and Feng Jie were murdered by you, and our relationship with Shattered Ice Manor was revealed prematurely, all because of you!” Feng Kai’s looks were handsome and face was white, but his eyes were ominous and deadly as he walked towards Qin Lie one step at a time.

He held a silver longsword in his hands with its tip gleaming on and off like a snake’s tongue, brimming with a faint chill.

“Our Shattered Ice Manor’s Elder Yan was also bitten by the Demon Wolf King and nearly died because of it. To this day, he is still stuck in a critical state and inside the recuperation site.” Yan Qingsong said with an expression of slight surprise, “What surprised me even more is that even Yan Ziqian had suffered a loss by hands. You’re a pretty troublesome brat, aren’t you.”

“It all ends here.” Feng Kai snorted coldly. The silver longsword in his hands shook, and the sword gleam turned into a thin and long silver thread that fiercely lunged at Qin Lie’s heart.

Qin Lie’s right hand abruptly shot out from his waist. Webs of electricity immediately formed at the head of Qin Shan’s wooden sculpture, bringing forth a massive amount of electricity that materialized into a faint blue electric screen.

“Zzzt Zzzt Zzzt!”

As Feng Kai swung his silver longsword, thin silver threads flew out rapidly. These threads were as sharp as needles, as nimble as snakes, and all thrust towards Qin Lie's body.

Holding the wooden sculpture in his hands, Qin Lie combined the lightning energy and spirit energy inside his body and shot them out wildly from the head of the wooden sculpture. They joined together to form a web of light built from lightning and covered the area right in front of his body.

Yan Qingsong continued to block the way on one side of the stone bridge and did not intend to immediately lend a hand. He simply watched the two fight with cold eyes.

He was surprised on the inside, surprised that Qin Lie wasn't killed instantly and that he was able to contest Feng Kai for even a moment even though Feng Kai was at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm.

"Miss, someone is fighting on top of the bridge." It was at this moment when a voice rang from behind Yan Qingsong.

When he turned around to take a look, he saw a beautiful woman dressed in white with a servant walking towards this bridge, looking like they were about to cross over it.

The woman in white was in fact the one who had arrived at Li's Shop last time and bought all of Qin Lie's Spirit Gathering Boards.

The old servant was also the same old servant, and his hand was still wearing the spatial ring that had filled Qin Lie with envy.