

Spirit Realm #Chapter 71 — 80

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Chapter 71: Resonance With Thunder

“Miss, look there. Isn’t that the kid from Li’s Shop, the one who sold the Spirit Gathering Boards to us?”

Upon seeing Qin Lie and Feng Kai’s battle atop the bridge, the old servant standing on the other end of the bridge slightly bowed his body and hurriedly informed the woman in white.

The woman in white’s eyes were as clear as translucent crystals, containing not even the slightest bit of impurities; she exuded a cold, graceful aura.

She prettily stood there, creating a beautiful scene. A scene that even overshadowed the beauty of the evening sunset. Her disposition caused those around her to feel a sense of inferiority and not dare look directly at her.

“Let’s watch first,” she indifferently said.

The old servant slightly nodded. Stopping at the end of the bridge, he looked at Qin Lie’s battle with Feng Kai, not even sparing a glance at Yan Qingsong.

“Such a beautiful girl!”

Yan Qingsong turned around, and after just a glance, his mind trembled. As if his vision had become rooted in place, it gathered onto the woman in white’s body, and an extremely distracted look emerged on his face.

Within Shattered Ice Manor, Yan Qingsong’s status was unordinary. After all, he was Yan Ziqian’s cousin. Thus, he had seen countless beauties. However, it was his first time seeing someone like the woman in white who was so eye-catching. He couldn’t help but become restless, it was as if he had lost his soul.

He only looked at the woman in white, and it seemed like he had temporarily forgotten about everything else, including the fight between Qin Lie and Feng Kai.

“Zing zing zing!”

Ray after ray of sharp sword beams shot out from the silver longsword in Feng Kai’s hand. The sword beams were like cold electricity as they cut into the stone bridge and caused stone fragments to fly everywhere, destroying quite a few stone blocks in the process.

Holding the wooden sculpture in his hand, Qin Lie had been forced into a tight corner by the silver sword beams, his body already showing one fine wound after another.

The electricity created by the wooden sculpture could only protect his vitals. However, Feng Kai's sword rays were like silver threads, absolutely everywhere. They attacked from every direction and every angle, preventing Qin Lie from blocking all of them.

Whenever those extremely sharp silver rays stabbed into his body, a fresh bleeding wound would immediately emerge.

Feng Kai was at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm whereas Qin Lie had just broken through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm. There was a giant one level gap between them. Regardless of whether it was the density of his spirit energy or his combat experience, Qin Lie was at a disadvantage.

Furthermore, Feng Kai's spirit techniques were more refined. His steps were like the wind, how he wielded his longsword cunning and vicious. He was consistently able to attack Qin Lie's vitals from blind spots.

If the electricity created by the wooden sculpture wasn't able to form such a sturdy defense or if Qin Lie's body wasn't incomparably tough, then he would have long since been unable to hold up and would have already been dismembered alive by Feng Kai.

"Drip! Drip!"

Drop after drop of fresh, bright red blood dripped from the wounds on his chest, back, and arms onto the bridge. It looked like a blossoming flower of blood had bloomed atop the stone bridge.

"Under my sword beam offensive from my Frost Song Sword, your body has actually not been torn to pieces. I must say I am truly surprised." As Feng Kai's figure flickered, he leisurely yet sarcastically said, "Not even your bones are broken! It seems that the amount of toughening your muscles and flesh have gone through is even greater than I thought. However, you will still not be able to escape dying!"

Qin Lie remained silent as he had no extra energy to utter anything. His mind was completely focused on infusing spirit energy with the energy of thunder and lightning within his body and wildly circulating.

"Boom!"

The rumbling of thunder suddenly emanated out from Qin Lie's chest cavity as the explosive thunder energy within his body's acupoints suddenly gushed out like a river overflowing its banks.

"Boom boom boom! Boom boom boom boom!"

Within all of the acupoints on his body, the same rumbling of thunder emanated out. Under the beautiful clear skies, a thunderclap could be heard.

“Boom!”

Under the evening’s glow and the setting sun, the sound of exploding thunder suddenly emanated down from the depths of the Ninth Heaven!

“Bzzt bzzt bzzt!”

A blazing, dragon-like bolt of lightning immediately appeared from the glowing sky, spiraling as it surged down and explosively shot into the stone bridge.

“Bang!”

The stone bridge, which connected Commerce Street with South City instantly exploded; the hard stone had been shattered into hundreds of flying stone chips.

Qin Lie, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong, who had been atop the stone bridge, seemed to have all been bombarded by the dragon-like lighting simultaneously and were sent flying into the rock and dust filled sky. The three of them all let out miserable cries as they fell together into the long, wide river below.

Eh?

An extremely shocked light emerged within the translucent eyes of the woman in white. She suddenly raised her head and looked up at the void in the glowing red sky, then lowered her head to look at the broken stone bridge, and lastly, at the flowing river below it.

Within the currents of the river, Qin Lie, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong were nowhere to be seen, as if they had sunken to the bottom of the river and then swept away by the current.

“With how the sky currently is, how could there be thunder and lightning?” asked the old servant with a look of surprise. “So peculiar. So very peculiar. And how was that lightning so accurate for it to strike the stone bridge right in front of us?”

“Thunder and lightning from the Ninth Heaven is not naturally formed, but something caused by a person,” suddenly replied the woman in white after thinking for a moment.

“Eh? Something caused by a person? Miss, do you mean?” asked the old servant, terrified.

“That apprentice at Li’s Shop,” said the woman in white, definitively nodding. “Before the lightning of the Ninth Heaven shot down from the void, the sound of rumbling thunder

emanated out from within his body. I don't know what strange art he has cultivated, but I can confirm... that a change within his body is what brought down the thunder and lightning from the depths of the Ninth Heaven."

The shocked old servant said, "Young miss, you are indeed experienced and knowledgeable. On our Scarlet Tide Continent, do you know of any lightning spirit art that is as overbearing?"

The woman in white furrowed her brows, carefully thinking for a while before gently shaking her head. "He hasn't even reached the Natal Opening Realm, but he can already incite the Ninth Heaven's godly thunder. I have never heard of such an overbearing and violent art formula."

After her remark, the old servant became increasingly shocked. After pondering for a moment, he then said, "If the thunder and lightning from the heavens instantly shattered the stone bridge, then just how will those three have ended up..."

"That apprentice who called down the thunder and lightning should be fine, but for the other two... it's hard to say. Even if they didn't die, they'd at least shed a layer of skin," faintly replied the woman in white.

As the two talked, more and more practitioners were attracted over to this remote area from the earlier sounds of explosions.

Once those people arrived and discovered that the bridge had been destroyed, they were all extremely shocked. They all began to converse with each other, trying to figure out what had happened.

At this time, the woman in white and her old servant changed their direction, crossing onto Commerce Street from another stone bridge.

The two directly went straight to Li's Shop.

Within the shop, Li Mu sat in his rocking chair, rocking back and forth as he lazily looked outside with narrow eyes.

When he saw the woman in white and the old servant enter, Li Mu's expression remained indifferent as he laughingly said, "This is the second time you two have come to my small shop, what would you like to see this time?"

"We still want more of the same Spirit Gathering Boards that we acquired last time. This time, we are willing to buy them two Common Grade Seven spirit stones per board. It has been so long, I wonder if you still have any in stock?" asked the old servant.

“The price doubled. Mn, it seems like you two understand the true value of Spirit Gathering Boards,” said Li Mu, faintly smiling. He then continued, “We are temporarily out of stock. We should have another stock after a while, please come again later.”

“The closest bridge to South City from here was just destroyed by Heavenly Thunder. You must have heard it,” suddenly said the woman in white.

“I heard it,” said Li Mu, nodding. Confused, he asked, “But what’s it have to do with me?”

“That apprentice from your store was on that exact bridge just now. When we were coming over just now, we coincidentally saw him,” explained the old servant.

Li Mu’s pupils shrank, his expression suddenly becoming serious as he stopped rocking in his chair.

The woman in white and her old servant profoundly looked at Li Mu as if they had hoped to learn something through him — Qin Lie who was able to incite the thunder and lightning of the Ninth Heaven to descend had clearly piqued their interest. They thought Li Mu might know something, so they silently observed him.

Li Mu suddenly closed his eyes.

The woman in white and the old servant both looked at him with dazzling eyes, but they weren’t able to see even the slightest sign of abnormality on Li Mu’s body after he closed his eyes.

“Please come again after a while, farewell,” politely said Li Mu, sending off his customers with his eyes still closed.

The eyes of the woman in white and the old servant showed surprise as they began to feel bewildered. Nodding their heads, they walked out of Li’s Shop with furrowed brows.

Not long after they left, that large, completely snow white wolfdog quietly walked over from the small courtyard in the back.

It strangely looked at Li Mu who had closed his eyes. It seemed as if it had felt some activity from Li Mu’s body and came to check out the situation.

After a while, Li Mu’s eyes opened as he returned to his usual indifferent attitude. He slightly laughed towards the giant wolfdog, then said, “I was just looking for a person. I didn’t think that I would even disturb you. Mn, it’s nothing, that brat is still fine. He only suffered some flesh wounds, haha.”

The large wolf-dog wagged its tail, seemingly bored as it once again returned to the backyard and crouched under a tree, closing its eyes.

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Within an alley which headed towards Nebula Pavilion.

Qin Lie suddenly appeared, his body drenched with water. His back, chest, and arms were all covered in obvious, bloody wounds. His face was sullen as he endured the piercing pain, as he stood within a secluded alley to avoid the crowds.

“Yan Qingsong, Feng Kai, if the two of you can survive this time... Next time, I will let you try an even more stimulating flavor!” muttered Qin Lie while grinding his teeth.

The thunder and lightning which had descended from the heavens had instantly destroyed the stone bridge and sent him, Yan Qingsong, and Feng Kai flying into the river.

He didn’t know about Yan Qingsong and Feng Kai, but after he had landed in the water, he had dove and swam. While everyone’s attention was diverted by the explosion, he had quietly crept ashore and walked towards Nebula Pavilion.

“I was truly fortuitous this time as I was actually able to accidentally incite the lightning of Ninth Heaven to descend. Otherwise, I might have actually died at the hands of Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong. Didn’t I have to cultivate the Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body before being able to attract the thunder and lightning to descend from the Ninth Heaven? With my body’s current state, it shouldn’t have reached the stage of the Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body, yet why did it turn out like this?”

Within the alley, Qin Lie furrowed his brows as he silently thought to himself, his expression becoming increasingly puzzled.

“Eh? Why is there such a strong scent of alcohol on me? I didn’t drink any alcohol, so just where did this scent come from?” Qin Lie suddenly smelled the fragrance of alcohol, causing his expression to become strange as he looked at his body. “My wounds! The scent of alcohol is coming from my wounds. What’s happening? This alcohol smells like Li Mu’s extremely strong wine!”

Qin Lie’s face showed a strong look of surprise.

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Chapter 72: A Reason to Move Forward

A strong scent of concentrated alcohol emanated out from the open wounds on Qin Lie’s body and filled the entire secluded alley, leaving behind an intoxicating fragrance which completely astounded Qin Lie.

Some kind of tingling feeling pervaded the fine wounds on his arms, chest, abdomen, and back.

When he gathered his mind to carefully examine himself, he discovered to his great surprise that his wounds, which had previously been bleeding, had not only stopped, but seemed to be clotting into scabs as well...

The several relatively lighter wounds, after clotting, had actually quickly healed!

"This..."

Within the alley, Qin Lie looked at his wounds in bewilderment, his face filled with disbelief.

"Uncle Li's... Uncle Li's strong wine actually has this kind of strange effect?!"

After quite a while, his body trembled somewhat as he suddenly looked in the direction of Li's Shop. His eyes lit up.

As he wasn't in a hurry to return to Nebula Pavilion and was instead looking for a secluded place nearby, he simply sat down and waited awhile in silence.

Before the skies began to darken, all of the wounds on his body had stopped bleeding. The tingling feeling which had pervaded his entire body, along with the smell of alcohol, had gradually disappeared as each wound scabbed.

After getting rid of the traces of blood on his body, he returned to Nebula Pavilion under the moonlight.

That night, he quietly gathered spirit energy within his small house and healed his wounds. He discovered that all wounds that had been inflicted by Feng Kai healed very quickly and weren't able to leave him injured for several days.

"Uncle Li, you are indeed an odd person."

The next morning, he continued going to Yao Tai's Artifact Forging Hall, learning about the unique characteristics of the various spirit materials beside Yao Tai. He also tried to figure out the steps for smelting spirit artifacts as he assisted Yao Tai in making them.

With the news spreading throughout Nebula Pavilion, he knew that after being stricken by the lightning bolt, Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong had seemingly been severely injured. As of today, they were both stuck in the Shattered Ice Manor's only Recuperating Manor to accompany Yan Dewu.

"The lightning bolt actually didn't kill the two of you; your two lives can be considered tenacious."

Qin Lie knew that there definitely wouldn't be any reconciliation between him, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong. Once those two recovered, they would definitely continue looking for opportunities for revenge. "Next time, you two might not be so fortunate!"

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Time flew by, and half a year passed.

During this half a year period, Qin Lie had spent his days learning about artifact forging with Yao Tai and the nights bitterly cultivating by either using the whirlpool in his dantian's spirit sea to temper spirit energy or by practicing inscribing spirit diagrams on spirit tablets.

By shadowing Yao Tai, he gradually became accustomed to the steps for refining a spirit artifact. He also memorized all of the unique characteristics of various spirit materials by heart. Other than having tried to refine a spirit artifact, he had completed all of the other steps.

With every circulation, the whirlpool within his dantian's spirit sea would purify spirit energy, refining the spirit energy within his spirit sea as he prepared to break into the Natal Opening Realm.

Of the four spirit diagram types, Amplification, Spirit Gathering, Spirit Storage, and Strengthening, he had mastered yet another one — Spirit Storage.

The Spirit Storage diagrams which he inscribed were able to create a something similar to the small world in his dantian's spirit sea within the center of the spirit tablet and could also absorb the spirit energy of the world, storing them for later use.

He had once tried to infuse all of his spirit energy into the Spirit Storage diagram and discovered that it was actually able to absorb it all!

This discovery caused him to become greatly excited!

If, if a portion of spirit energy was stored within a Spirit Storage Board, could they replenish themselves using the Spirit Storage Board and instantly recover their ability to fight when they ran out of spirit energy midfight?

Once this question arose within his mind, he was in high spirits and prepared to try it out.

He refined three Spirit Storage Boards in which he respectively stored a portion of his spirit energy. Afterwards, he tested them one by one and found that the spirit energy stored within the Spirit Storage Board could indeed be retrieved!

This meant that his idea was feasible!

“If I refined dozens of these Spirit Storage Boards and stored spirit energy into them, then when I fight with someone, wouldn’t I have a never ending source of spirit energy to replenish myself with? This would be much more powerful than using some Spirit Recovering Pill!”

However, three days later, Qin Lie discovered that he had overlooked one big problem — The spirit energy within the Spirit Storage Board constantly decreased.

It was impossible for the spirit energy to be stored forever.

In order to fill the three Spirit Storage Boards with spirit energy, he had paused his cultivation and spent nine days infusing spirit energy.

However, after another three days, more than half of the spirit energy within the Spirit Storage Boards had already dissipated.

Spirit Storage Boards could store spirit energy, but they couldn’t keep it tightly sealed. The stored spirit energy would slowly dissipate over time until all of it disappeared.

If he spent a lot of time and energy on storing spirit energy in those Spirit Storage Boards, his cultivating speed would be greatly affected. Furthermore, the spirit energy that he bitterly stored would slowly dissipate...

—It was obviously not worthwhile.

“That wooden sculpture that Grandpa refined also had a Spirit Storage diagram, and it contained a ball of pure spirit energy. I wonder... if its energy also dissipated in a similar manner?”

With this thought, he took out the wooden sculpture that Qin Shan had left behind and used a strand of mind consciousness to sense it. He felt the scorching white ball of spirit energy within the complex spirit diagram and carefully tried to understand it slowly.

An extremely small amount of spirit energy fluctuation was emitted from that scorching white ball of light and floated out of the wooden sculpture, turning into a part of the spirit energy of the world...

“So the Spirit Storage diagram within the wooden sculpture is the same. It too cannot prevent the leakage and will also slowly lose spirit energy over time,” suddenly said Qin Lie. “It seems this is also the first principle of nature, a rule which cannot be changed. As for why the scorching white ball of spirit energy within the wooden sculpture has yet to completely dissipate, there can only be one reason — that ball of spirit energy is too pure and dense. Although it has constantly diminished since it was created, it still hasn’t completely faded away.”

He rubbed his chin, carefully thinking for a while before coming up with another thought, "But it's not like it doesn't have uses. If one knows that they are about to fight and knows when there will be danger, they can store spirit energy in advance to create a few Spirit Boards and use them before the spirit energy dissipates; it can still achieve a surprising effect."

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"Uncle Han, is there any news from the Ling Family?" habitually asked Qin Lie, who had once again gone over to visit Han Qingrui today.

As half a year had passed, he had already turned seventeen.

Based on his grandfather's letter, he would return to Ling Town before Qin Lie's seventeenth birthday to find him. Since the Ling Family members knew he was at Nebula Pavilion, as long as there was news of his grandfather's return, they would definitely notify him through a letter.

Han Qingrui was the person in charge of collecting and organizing all the letters. If the Ling Family sent any, it would definitely be sent to him.

"Still none," said Han Qingrui, shaking his head. "Qin Lie, just this last month, you have come five times. Honestly, you don't need to come over at all. If they send any news about your grandfather, I will naturally go over and notify you. You don't have to constantly worry over this matter and repeatedly run here."

"There's still no news..."

He didn't even listen to the rest of Han Qingrui's words as his mood suddenly sunk and his head dropped. He silently thought, "I'm already seventeen, but Grandpa still hasn't returned. Seeing these circumstances, it seems something really did happen. Grandpa did say that if he hadn't returned before my seventeenth birthday that I shouldn't worry about him and don't need to bother finding him. He wanted me to cultivate instead, wait until I reached a certain level and break through the seal on the Soul Suppressing Orb. Once I regain my memories, I would also be able to understand what had happened."

"Qin Lie! Qin Lie!" gently said Han Qingrui.

"What?" asked Qin Lie with a depressed expression, his eyes soulless as he raised his head. "Uncle Han, what is it?"

"Although there is no news concerning your grandfather, there is a letter for you from Dark Asura Hall. Take a look." Han Qingrui handed him a light yellow envelope, his eyes expressing shock as he said, "I never thought that you would even have people that you know within Dark Asura Hall, eh?"

"I don't." Qin Lie also had a puzzled expression. After opening the letter, he read it with furrowed brows for quite a while before he finally came to a realization.

The letter had come from Ling Yushi, who had requested a friend in Dark Asura Hall to send it. Seven Fiends Valley had a great relationship with Dark Asura Hall. Thus, those within their younger generation would frequently work together and become acquainted with each other.

As Nebula Pavilion was a vassal force of Dark Asura Hall, it was very convenient for people to pass information to Nebula Pavilion through Dark Asura Hall.

Ling Yushi's letter was very long and touched on many things, such as her cultivation progress within Seven Fiends Valley and the amount of attention the two sisters received from Granny Jiu. Not only could they condition their body with precious spirit pills, they were also able to temper their bodies by soaking in the liquid of rare crushed herbs. Thus, their cultivation had risen quickly.

Currently, she had already broken through to the Natal Opening Realm while her sister Ling Xuanxuan was at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, seemingly about to break through.

Ling Yushi indirectly touched on the things she longed for, saying that after a period of time, she would try to politely ask Granny Jiu if she would let her return to Ling Town.

She also spoke about how she was secretly in possession of a few pills which she had found within some of the body refinement rooms and how she would give them to him when she returned.

"It's not from Dark Asura Hall, it's from Seven Fiends Valley..." said Qin Lie, putting away the letter, his heart warm.

The gentle words within Ling Yushi's letter had softened his pain from waiting for his grandfather's return.

This kind of feeling where he was constantly being missed by someone, where someone was constantly thinking about him, caused him to feel a little joy and made him feel better.

"Haha, it seems like it must have been that young miss from the Ling Family." Han Qingrui laughed as he patted Qin Lie's shoulder, gently saying, "Seven Fiends Valley is the same rank as Dark Asura Hall and is a bit stronger than Nebula Pavilion. However, it's not like you have no chance of entering. You are still young, and that youth is your potential. Uncle Han believes you will be able to see the young miss of the Ling Family again."

“Mn, thanks Uncle Han.” Qin Lie nodded. “If you receive news of my grandpa, you must remember to notify me.” He turned around and left.

The missing Qin Shan and Ling Yushi’s longing for him had become the driving force of his efforts.

During the next period of time, he put his entire heart into it, whether it was practicing spirit diagrams, refining his martial art, or even analyzing fighting skills.

He could frequently be found in the Scripture Tower, the practice grounds of the Cultivation Grounds, the Meditation Room, and the Combat Room.

Nebula Pavilion’s contribution points that he had accumulated rapidly declined as his knowledge on the various aspects of the martial way became increasingly profound. His combat experience had also rapidly increased.

Chapter 73: Accumulation

In Nebula Pavilion’s large specialized combat room, there was a fake mountain area, a forested area, an urban street area, and a river area, all simulated to help martial practitioners adjust to fighting in various environments and directly increase their combat experience.

“Whoosh whoosh whoosh!”

Two figures flashed among the rocky peaks of the fake mountain area. Two balls of white light occasionally collided or violently charged on the large stones that caused the rock to fragment.

Suddenly, a ball of white light hit a large rock and suddenly stopped, turning into Gao Yu.

“Gao Yu, even if you and I do not use the arts we cultivate, it’s hard for you to defeat me.” The other ball of white light also landed and turned into a heavily-sweating Qin Lie.

He was now slightly taller, and even though his body was as thin as always, he did not seem as small anymore...

“You freak, your body is even stronger than those in the Natal Opening Realm. It really isn’t easy to win against you,” Gao Yu snorted; he too was also sweating heavily.

After fighting, his complexion seemed even more pale as though he was a seriously ill patient that left his sickbed and made people worry that he would quickly collapse and never get back up.

Yet Qin Lie knew how terrifying Gao Yu was and knew what cunning and vicious killing moves lay beneath this person's seemingly ill appearance.

In this period of time, he learned artifact forging from Yao Tai during the day and frequently sparred against Gao Yu in the Combat Room.

After the fight against Feng Kai last time, he realized that he lacked combat experience, so he had recently borrowed books on this subject from Scripture Tower. After he studied it, Gao Yu coincidentally wanted to win against him and proactively invited him to battle. He readily agreed, and the two started to fight in the Combat Room.

At the beginning, Gao Yu fought using the art recorded on the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record. When it crossed against his Heavenly Thunder Eradication, it was defeated every single time.

Heavenly Thunder Eradication was the bane of all scriptures that used dark souls or angry spirits. Gao Yu using his spirit art of the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record to fight against him was basically asking to be humiliated.

When the evil or dark spirits appeared, they would instantly turn to ashes when struck by the heavenly lightning.

After multiple times, Gao Yu himself admitted that Qin Lie was his bane. He was not willing to give up and stipulated that the two of them should use a different method to fight — he would not use the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record and Qin Lie was similarly not allowed to use Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

It was a fight based purely on spirit energy and the body.

Gao Yu had a plethora of combat experience and in the second battle, he held the advantage which caused Qin Lie to become disheveled and in more even circumstances.

But because Qin Lie's physical body was extremely strong, he never truly lost even though he was always at the disadvantage. After he underwent Gao Yu's barrage, his body would frequently just be lightly wounded, and it did not greatly affect his combat capabilities.

Therefore, Qin Lie was repeatedly beaten down by Gao Yu in the beginning, but he did not lose.

After sparring multiple times, Qin Lie slowly found the trick, and the one-sided situation slowly turned around.

As his combat experience grew, the advantage of his strong body was completely utilized. He started to turn from the defender to the attacker, and how he fought became disciplined while Gao Yu gradually showed his exhaustion.

In the recent few sessions, when the two battled again, Gao Yu became the one that could not stand up.

His body would not be able to stand up when Qin Lie ferociously attacked with a storm of fierce blows in close quarters, and he would lose first.

Gao Yu did not have friends in Nebula Pavilion; his personality was eccentric and made people feel he was dark and hard to interact with, so he rarely conversed with others.

It was only due to his frequent fights with Qin Lie that the two gradually grew familiar. Qin Lie also became Gao Yu's only friend in Nebula Pavilion.

"In Nebula Pavilion, there probably aren't any martial practitioners of the same level that can best us." Gao Yu stood next to the stone peak, and his slightly brooding face showed seriousness. "But that is not definite. There are many variables in battle. Spirit artifacts are an extremely large variable. If an opponent possesses a powerful high ranked spirit artifact, they can defeat either of us by relying on the advantage of the spirit artifact."

"Your spirit artifact is not ordinary. You can use the spirit artifact and even cause those in the preliminary stages of the Natal Opening Realm to be disheveled. It is only that the art I cultivate in that is your bane. If you were facing anyone else with a slightly higher realm, you would easily be able to suppress them," Qin Lie said.

"Mn, it is exactly as you said." Gao Yu nodded. "Since I have this kind of spirit artifact, others can as well, so we both need to be careful."

"Why say this?" Qin Lie asked.

"The outside hasn't been peaceful recently. It seems the spirit beasts of the Arctic Mountain Range have come out and attacked the little villages and towns near the border. There were several of my Gao Family's clansmen that were bitten to death by spirit beasts. I heard my dad say that the spirit beasts have been acting unusual recently. Their area of activity is too broad, and they might take unusual actions."

Gao Yu explained, "If there aren't any unexpected incidents, Nebula Pavilion will arrange for martial practitioners to eradicate the spirit beasts. I've used up pretty much all my contribution points, so I am preparing to take a mission."

Hearing him mention contribution points, Qin Lie's face became bitter, "I've used up most of my contribution points too."

Borrowing books from Scripture Tower required contribution points, using the Gravity Room, Meditation Room, and Combat Room to cultivate also used up contribution points.

Recently, he had visited those places frequently and almost used all of his contribution points. When he came to the Combat Room today, the person at registration had told him that he only had ninety-three contribution points left.

To receive contribution points from Nebula Pavilion required one to go on missions such as going out to hunt spirit beasts, finding spirit mines and materials, killing martial practitioners from enemy forces, and so on.

In order to utilize Nebula Pavilion's cultivation resources, one had to have contribution points. Otherwise, one was not allowed to enter Scripture Tower, Artifact Tower, and all other kinds of cultivation grounds.

"You are with Yao Tai and definitely have no way of getting contribution points. You've also been very diligent in cultivating recently, and I guessed that you have pretty much used up all of your contribution points." Gao Yu thought and then said, "I will go ask about the situation and see if there are any missions. If you don't have anything to do in the near future, you can come with me."

"Mn, let's see what missions there are first." Qin Lie nodded.

A piece of rock suddenly came from the street area that was next to them. The rock hit Gao Yu's calf and caused Gao Yu's face to turn cold and darkly say, "Which son of a b*tch is throwing rocks around?"

"Bastard, what are you talking about?" Several young martial practitioners showed their heads in the street area next to them, and a tall person shouted.

"Wei Li, do not pay attention to that crazy dog, let's continue our training." Liu Ting was clad in rose-red attire as she valiantly stood at the corner of the street and prettily said that as she wrinkled her nose.

Qin Lie turned his head to look. That group was Liu Ting and Wei Li; Liu Ting was the daughter of the vice pavilion master, Liu Yun, while Wei Li was Elder Wei Xing's son.

Wei Xing was on Liu Yuntao's side and one of those that leaned towards Liu Yuntao succeeding as pavilion master.

Gao Yu's expression was icy as he bent his head to find a fist-sized rock. He aimed at Wei Li's chest and suddenly threw it.

That rock whistled and was extremely forceful. If Wei Li was struck, he would definitely have to lay on the bed for a few days.

Wei Li's talent was very normal and only at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm, slightly lower compared to Qin Lie and Gao Yu. Seeing the rock howling as it came, his face couldn't help but change.

Liu Ting shouted, her left hand reaching out lightning fast and steadily received the rock; her body just shook lightly.

She snorted and then said with a cold face, "As expected, he's a rabid dog, biting whoever he sees. Wei Li, ignore them. Both of them are poor and have used up all their contribution points. In a few days, we won't see them in the cultivation grounds anymore. The outside hasn't been peaceful recently, and many people will be sent out on missions. These two might go out and never come back, so why pay attention to them?"

"Sister Ting is right," hurriedly said Wei Lie after he released a breath.

"The next time your rocks dare to fly astray, what will be returned won't be rocks. Instead, I'll let you have a taste of my vengeance spirits." Gao Yu's expression was dark as he replied coldly and then left shoulder to shoulder with Qin Lie.

In the days to come, when Qin Lie was learning artifact forging from Yao Tai, martial practitioners would continuously come and ask Yao Tai to help fix their spirit artifacts.

"There seem to be many people sent out on missions. It really is troublesome that so many people's spirit artifacts are damaged. They are wasting my artifact forging time." Yao Tai complained every day. "If the spirit artifact material has not been heavily damaged, it can still be used, but if the spirit diagram is damaged, then it needs to be repaired. The repair of the spirit diagrams is not so simple, and is too deep for you. You don't need to come for the next few days."

With that, Qin Lie temporarily had nothing to do during the day.

"Qin Lie, come and chat with me." This day, when Qin Lie returned to his little room, he heard Zhuo Qian shout.

Twisting his head to look, Qin Lie found Zhuo Qian in her little three-story tower as she leaned against the window and beckoned for him to come over with a hand.

"Coming." Qin Lie smiled and naturally walked to Zhuo Qian's little tower.

In this period of time, he frequently went to Zhuo Qian's place to chat. Sometimes it was about cultivation, sometimes about the state of Dark Asura Hall, and sometimes about the unique attributes of Seven Fiends Valley.

"What has Sister Qian been busy with recently?" asked Qin Lie when he came over.

“Gathering spirit materials. I’m preparing to ask someone to forge a suitable spirit artifact for me, so I’ve only returned to the pavilion these few days ago.” Zhuo Qian was wearing sleeping robes and was in a lazy state. She smoothed the bangs in front of her forehead as she said with worry and vexation, “Sigh, I’ve gathered all the spirit materials and sent it over. I just don’t know if it will be a success. If it fails, I’m done for.”

It was not difficult for the martial practitioners of Nebula Pavilion to get spirit artifacts. They could search and trade for them in the Artifact Tower through the use of contribution points. But the majority of spirit artifacts in the Artifact Tower were not of high rank and were all forged by Yao Tai.

If one had enough spirit stones and could go to the Commerce Street, they could pick higher ranked spirit artifacts in places like Armament Pavilion.

—The spirit artifacts there were of better quality than those Yao Tai forged and were much stronger.

Of course, those who were pickier and had their own avenues would find special spirit artifacts themselves and find an artificer to custom-make one for them. They would smelt a unique spirit artifact that was most appropriate for them based on their cultivation and art.

These spirit artifacts that were forged based on the user’s attributes were the ones that martial practitioners dreamed about and also the most valuable and suitable for them.

Both Zhuo Qian and Tu Ze’s fathers were commanders of Dark Asura Hall, so both were the type with such avenues. They could ask high ranked artificers to make a spirit artifact specifically for them.

“Tu Ze has gone to Dark Asura Hall with his spirit materials and also the spirit materials I’ve gathered. He knows my situation very well and will tell everything to the artificer there. As to whether a suitable spirit artifact can be made for me... no one can say for sure.”

Zhuo Qian’s face was full of worry. “This is the third time. If it fails again, I’m afraid I won’t be able to bear it.”

“It’s failed twice?” Qin Lie was shocked.

“What did you think?”

Zhuo Qian grimaced. “The failure rate of artifact forging far surpasses the rate of success. The higher the rank of the spirit artifact, the higher the rate of failure. Yet, for the uniqueness, for it to be completely complementary with the art, sometimes, one must swallow the bitter pill of failure.”

He looked at Qin Lie and forced a smile. "This is actually not bad. If Tu Ze fails this time, it is his fourth time; he's worse off than I am..."

"Uh, after failure, does the artificer need to take responsibility?" Qin Lie was astounded inside.

"What responsibility does the artificer need to take?" Zhuo Qian's face was puzzled. "Even the top artificers do not dare to guarantee a hundred percent success rate. Failure is a normal event, nothing to wonder at. Even if the forging fails, we still need to pay a portion of the fee. Did you assume that the artificer would work for free?"

"You need to pay even if it fails?" Qin Lie's eyebrows rose.

"Of course. Even though the fee is slightly lower than if it succeeds, the fee is still definitely something that has to be paid." Zhuo Qian nodded and said in a matter-of-fact manner, "There is no artificer that forges for free. Success or failure, they will take their fee. This is a basic rule of the artificer world."

Chapter 74: The Risks of Artifact Forging

The artificer did not have to take on any of the risk. Regardless of whether it succeeded or not, the artificer would still take their payment; they would not forge for nothing.

—This was the fundamental rule of the artificer world.

"I've followed Great Master Yao for some time. His success rate is very high, and he rarely fails," said Qin Lie.

"Great Master Yao?" Zhuo Qian's expression was strange. "Forget about it. In the eyes of true artificers, he is unacceptable."

"How so?"

"The reason his success rate is very high is that he always forges the way he wants instead of taking into account a martial practitioner's requirements, rank, and physique as well as the art they cultivate. For example, if a tailor makes an article of clothing, but they do not measure and instead make it according to their own wishes rather than meeting the customer's requirements, this kind of clothing is definitely easy to make, right?"

"Yes."

"The clothing that is made is clothing, but if the customer doesn't feel comfortable wearing it, they wouldn't wear it, right?"

"Mn."

“A true artificer will not forge however they wish, but will consider everything about a martial practitioner. Their rank, the art they cultivate in, the strength of their body, their height, the size of their hands, and even the thickness of their fingers!” Zhuo Qian’s expression was stern. “Only through this can the artifact produced feel comfortable when touched by a martial practitioner and, when used, will it feel like a part of the user’s body and greatly increase the power of the martial practitioner.”

Zhuo Qian smiled faintly. “This is true artifact forging and the process that a high ranked artificer must go through. Of course, the probability of failure is higher like this. However, the spirit artifact produced is one of a kind and the most suitable for the intended person; it can unlock a martial practitioner’s true power.”

“After what you have said, I finally understand.” Qin Lie nodded and showed a thoughtful expression.

“Tu Ze and I did not go to Great Master Yao because, first, his artificer level is not high, and the other reason is that he will not make a spirit artifact tailored to us.” Zhuo Qian’s brow creased slightly and sincerely said, “Qin Lie, I know you are very interested in artifact forging, but that Great Master Yao... can’t really be said to be a famed master. He also keeps the spirit diagrams extremely close to his chest, you can’t learn anything.”

“No problem, I have no intentions of stealing his spirit diagrams, haha.” Qin Lie laughed.

“Mn, the outside has not been peaceful recently. Be careful and try to not leave the city.” Zhuo Qian thought and then added on, “Do not take any missions at the moment, it is too dangerous. Many people have died recently, and not just those from Nebula Pavilion or Shattered Ice Manor, even those from Crimson Flame Association and Water Moon Sect have been repeatedly attacked by spirit beasts. Many martial practitioners have also died there.”

Qin Lie’s expression changed. Crimson Flame Association and Water Moon Sect were also Limestone rank forces. They were not distant from Icestone City and were also close to the Arctic Mountain Range. He hadn’t expected that they would also be attacked by spirit beasts.

“What happened?” he asked in puzzlement.

“I heard that Dark Asura Hall has said that the beast king of the Arctic Mountain Range has changed. In the past, the spirit beast king of the Arctic Mountain Range was the ‘Icestone Snow Wolf King.’”

Zhuo Qian’s expression was grave. “After it left, the spirit beasts of the Arctic Mountain Range underwent a bloody conflict and the ‘Purple-eyed Flame Lion King’ has ascended to the seat of the beast king. After this violent and vicious spirit beast ascended, he directly destroyed the past agreement the ‘Icestone Snow Wolf King’ had

made with the martial practitioners nearby. Large numbers of spirit beasts that live in the Arctic Mountain Range have come out of the mountains and have directed their fangs at the low ranking forces nearby.

“This conflict will most likely not end that quickly. That ‘Purple-eyed Flame Lion King’ needs to make a display of his power to force the neighboring martial forces to make a new agreement with it. I heard that high ranking martial practitioners from Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley have been deployed. They will soon go to the Arctic Mountain Range to kill the spirit beasts. They need to create an advantage in the battle and put pressure on that ‘Purple-Eyed Flame Lion King’ so they have the initiative when making a new agreement.

“So it won’t be peaceful in the near future, and there will be many people who will die. The spirit beasts will become even more lawless. Before the new agreement is made, the battle between the two sides will continue. Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Flame Association, Water Moon Sect, and the other Limestone forces around the mountain range will be pulled into this conflict. They will be organized by Black Iron powers like Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley to wage a large scale conflict against the spirit beasts.”

Zhuo Qian explained the details and told him the reason it would not be peaceful in the near future so he would be careful and not take missions unless it was necessary.

Qin Lie noted it down.

A fortnight later, the conflict between the spirit beasts and martial practitioners did not seem to subside and instead became even more heated; the state of the battle gradually intensified.

Dozens of people from Nebula Pavilion alone had died, and even more were wounded. When Qin Lie went to Yao Tai’s place, he would always see Yao Tai hurrying to repair spirit artifacts. He did not have the free time to work on artifact forging any longer.

The three elders, Du Haitian, Wei Xing, and Chu Yan, seemed to be constantly roaming the outsides with their subordinates and hunting the spirit beasts that appeared near Icestone City. They would occasionally return to Nebula Pavilion to replenish their food supply and spirit stones. Each of them had heavy expressions; many had visible wounds, and there were people that did not return.

Even Ye Yangqiu, who usually was just responsible for the Discipline Hall, also had to participate under heavy pressure and started to clear out the spirit beasts in the surroundings.

The subordinate forces of Nebula Pavilion, such as the Ling, Du, and Gao Families, had to temporarily move into Icestone City to avoid dying at the fangs of the spirit beasts.

Nebula Pavilion's cultivation grounds, like the Combat Room and the Gravity Room, were suddenly full of people. Every martial practitioner was concentrating on cultivation.

Because, as the pressure increased, the pavilion had arranged many for missions. Any martial practitioner of Nebula Pavilion could be asked to complete a mission.

If they had to go out, there was the risk of death, so all the martial practitioners of the pavilion became especially diligent.

"Yesterday, a commander of Dark Asura Hall died in battle in the Arctic Mountain Range. That commander was in the middle stage of the Manifestation Realm, but he was swallowed whole by a Rank Three 'Metal Wing Golden Horn Lizard.' It really is terrifying. The fact that a powerful warrior whose cultivation was at the middle stage of the Manifestation Realm was eaten alive by a spirit beast... is frightening to think about."

"There is a martial practitioner in the late stage of the Manifestation realm from Seven Fiends Valley called Qiu Xudong. Didn't he kill two Rank Three 'Blue-eyed Toads'?"

"That Qiu Xudong really struck it rich. I heard that the eyes of 'Blue-eyed Toads' are worth cities and are treasures for forging high level spirit artifacts. Their teeth and skin are also very good; that guy really gained a lot this time, so lucky."

"Only by surviving and killing high ranking spirit beasts can one have great gains. If one was like the person from Dark Asura Hall and was eaten alive by a 'Metal Wing Golden Horn Lizard,' that is a fate worse than death."

"Yeah. Sigh, there isn't enough manpower, so we're most likely going to be sent out."

"I'm a bit afraid."

In the direction of the Combat Room's street area, a group of martial practitioners had stopped and were discussing the current situation with troubled faces.

It was Wei Li and Liu Ting's group.

Wei Li and Liu Ting had both rank and status in Nebula Pavilion, and in normal circumstances, they would not be sent out on missions. But if the pavilion really lacked manpower, they could not escape and would be forced to complete missions.

All sorts of news had traveled to Icestone City recently which caused many of the young generation that had not been baptized in blood to panic and worry, fearful they would be sent out by the pavilion.

"Qin Lie, Elder Ye doesn't have enough people, so I'm preparing to leave in the next few days." In the stone woods, Gao Yu's expression was dark and cold. "The situation

outside is very chaotic, but it is very profitable to earn contribution points through the hunting of spirit beasts. I don't have sufficient contribution points, and I've reached a bottleneck in my cultivation recently, so I'm preparing to go out to move a little."

Gao Yu had two older sisters in Nebula Pavilion. His eldest sister had married a hall master under the command of Elder Chu Yan. It was a pity that the hall master had unluckily died in combat while on a mission, so his eldest sister became a widow.

His second sister was in the Discipline Hall and it was said that she had a close relationship with Ye Yangqiu. Ye Yangqiu... would possibly become Gao Yu's second brother-in-law.

It was due to this that Liu Yan had stayed close with Gao Yu in the past at Celestial Wolf Mountain.

One reason that Gao Yu was admitted to Nebula Pavilion earlier than usual was that the Gao Family had suffered great losses in Celestial Wolf Mountain. The other reason was because both of his sisters had their own connections in Nebula Pavilion. So after Gao Yu came to Nebula Pavilion, others would frequently gossip behind his back and say that he had only been admitted because of his two sisters.

While Qin Lie had chosen to stay by Great Master Yao, Gao Yu chose the Discipline Hall. His position was in Discipline Hall, and he was thought of highly by Ye Yangqiu.

But right now, even Ye Yangqiu had to go out to hunt spirit beasts. As a member of the Discipline Hall, he also lacked contribution points, and he also liked to fight, so there was no reason for him to stay in the pavilion.

"Be careful," Qin Lie said.

"Don't worry, when I return, I will receive a ton of contribution points. At that point of time, we can use my contribution points to stay in the Combat Room. Recently... we've used your contribution points," Gao Yu said with a creased brow.

"Haha, I only have ten contribution points left, I've almost used all of them," Qin Lie said helplessly.

"Mn, wait for me to return. By then, there will be more than enough contribution points." Gao Yu said confidently.

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"Qin Lie! Come over and accompany Big Brother to drink!"

Returning to the little room from the cultivation grounds, before he entered, he heard Tu Ze's shout from Zhuo Qian's little tower.

Turning his head to look, he found that Zhuo Qian's little tower was fully lit. Han Feng, Chu Peng, Kang Zhi and Zhuo Qian were all present, drinking and eating.

"Coming." Qin Lie smiled. He didn't enter his own room and turned to walk towards Zhuo Qian's.

Entering, he found that Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's eyes were red, and their emotional states were strange. The two of them were drinking heavily as though to wash away their worries.

Beside the dining table was a longblade and a beautiful Dragon Bone Whip on a separate table.

These two weapons were extremely similar to the ones that Zhuo Qian and Tu Ze used before, but they were clearly more exquisite and looked more beautiful. However... there was no spirit energy fluctuations, so they did not seem to be spirit artifacts.

"All failed, third time for me, fourth time for Tu Ze." Zhuo Qian's beautiful face was filled with helplessness and dispiritedness. "To gather the spirit materials for artifact forging, we worked extremely hard. Those spirit artifacts are at least worth one thousand Common Grade Seven spirit stones. I didn't expect it to all turn to scrap in one go."

"Don't mention these hurtful things. Drink drink," Tu Ze shouted with red eyes.

"How can I not care?" Zhuo Qian sighed. "More than one thousand Common Grade Seven spirit stones, even for you and I, it is a great sum. Also, many of our spirit materials were gathered through the help of our fathers. It's all ruined. I don't know when the next time we can acquire them all will be."

"Didn't we already prepare?" Tu Ze forced a smile. "How can artifact forging succeed on the first try? Some people will ask an artificer to forge seven or eight times and every single one would be a failure. For the spirit artifact most fitting to the hand, most suited to oneself and one-of-a-kind, one must learn to taste the bitter pill of failure."

"Tasting failure three times in a row, I almost... cannot bear it." Zhuo Qian's face was full of bitterness as she said that in disappointment.

Tu Ze gave a long sigh, his head lowered. He remained silent and did not know what to say. It appeared that this was a great blow to him too, and he really was not as relaxed as he appeared on the surface.

Instead of going to the dining table, Qin Lie hesitated before arriving at the round table where the two artifacts were placed. He picked up that longblade and felt it with his mind.

An extremely strange expression suddenly appeared on his face.

Chapter 75: Defective Product

Within the longblade, three spirit diagrams were embedded together. He did not recognize the primary spirit diagram which had a relatively unique structure that formed a nebula cluster with specks of starlight.

He examined and then found out that the stars of the main spirit diagram were a reaction caused by a special material called Stellar Iron.

In other words, the primary diagram in the nebula cluster was important to stimulate the Stellar Iron and bring out its abilities.

Qin Lie wasn't familiar with the primary diagram and did not know its name. He could just barely see its effects and was unable to copy or modify it.

The other two spirit diagrams were a Spirit Gathering diagram and an Amplification diagram. They were both basic spirit diagrams.

Also, compared to the Spirit Gathering and Amplification diagrams that he had mastered, the Spirit Gathering and Amplification inside the longblade seemed to be simplified versions. Whether it was the level of detail or the number of spirit lines inscribed, it was much weaker.

The Spirit Gathering and Amplification diagrams were embedded within the primary diagram. The Amplification diagram had been successfully inscribed, but the Spirit Gathering diagram... was only half complete and seemed like the person had abruptly stopped there.

In other words, the spirit diagram inside the longblade had not been successfully inscribed at all.

It was only a half finished product.

His eyes were startled as he took out the Dragon Bone Whip and felt it with his mind.

The situation was slightly different but generally the same.

The Dragon Bone Whip was made with four spirit diagrams. The primary diagram was snake-shaped; it was long and twisted, and it filled the inside of the whip as the main channel. It was also the core of the Dragon Bone Whip's spirit diagram and the crucial factor in expressing its ability—the main diagram did not have any problems.

The other three spirit diagrams were a Spirit Storage diagram, a Spirit Gathering diagram, and an Amplification diagram. Of those, the Spirit Storage and Spirit Gathering diagrams were completely inscribed.

The one that had a problem was the Amplification diagram.

The Amplification diagram inside the Dragon Bone Whip was also only half-inscribed. The artificer seemed to have discovered something and suddenly stopped.

The situation was the same as the longblade.

Both were half-completed products, and other than the primary formation that was hard to understand, Qin Lie found that the basic Spirit Gathering, Amplification, and Spirit Storage diagrams were crude and without finesse. The structures were loose and messy, far lacking compared to the three basic spirit diagrams he knew.

There were no problems with the primary diagrams of the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip. The problem lied in the Spirit Gathering and Amplification diagrams, yet they were both basic diagrams.

“Big Brother Tu, Sister Zhuo, the spirit diagrams inside this longblade and Dragon Bone Whip... seem incomplete, why is it so?” asked Qin Lie after a moment of silence.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian were using the liquor to wash away their worries in depressed moods. Kang Zhi and the others were trying to comfort them.

They saw Qin Lie’s movements and had thought Qin Lie was just curious, so they had not paid it any mind.

Hearing Qin Lie’s inquiry, Tu Ze managed to respond and said with a grimace, “It seems Brother Lie’s been with Master Yao for a while and learned something about forging. You are right, the spirit diagrams of the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip were, in the end, not inscribed.”

An inquisitive gaze appeared in Qin Lie’s eyes.

Tu Ze put down the drinking bowl and explained to him, “Because when Great Master Lu was halfway in the forging process, he found that the Spirit Gathering diagram could not perfectly combine with the primary diagram. It might be a problem due to how it was planned out or a conflict between the materials. In any case, even if the Spirit Gathering diagram was inscribed completely, it cannot fully take advantage of the unique attributes of the primary diagram nor can it completely rouse the Stellar Iron, so this spirit artifact cannot surpass the Common Grade Four rank. In his eyes, this is a defective product.

“It is the same with Zhuo Qian’s whip, the Amplification diagram cannot truly combine with the primary diagram and cannot channel the full power of the material. This way, even if the Amplification diagram is inscribed, the level of the whip will be greatly lowered and cannot reach his predicted goal.”

Tu Ze shook his head and helplessly said, "Great Master Lu can accept failed products, but not defective ones, so when he saw it was unable to succeed, he was not willing to continue, and will not allow low level defective products to appear. For him, spirit artifacts below Common Grade Four is a humiliation to him, he definitely will not allow them to appear."

"Great Master Lu is a Profound Second Rank artificer. The spirit artifacts he forges needs to be at least Common Grade Six! Any spirit artifacts that are lower than Common Grade Six will cause him to lose face, so he can accept failure but not the creation of low grade spirit artifacts," added on Zhuo Qian and then helplessly finished, "Do you understand now?"

Qin Lie silently nodded.

He had followed Master Yao for a period of time and understood the artificer world. He knew that artificers had an eccentric habit — they could accept failure, but not defective works.

The great majority of artificers were perfectionists; rare were those that would make do.

He also knew that an artificer would usually have a plan before they inscribed spirit diagrams for the artifact.

They would design a compound diagram with basic diagrams and a primary diagram that was suited for the artifact. They would also first experiment on different kinds of spirit tablets. Only when there were no problems during testing would they finally inscribe them onto the spirit artifact itself.

While the compound diagrams that were specifically designed for spirit artifacts would not have problems on the spirit tablets, when they were actually used on the spirit artifact, there would be many unpredictable variables.

The material of the spirit diagram was made from many spirit materials smelted together and were more complex than spirit tablets. There were also special powers that could exist inside high level spirit materials...

With all this, the compound spirit diagram that had no problems on the spirit tablets had a high possibility of accidents on the spirit artifact.

Spirit diagrams collapsing in the process was an extremely common occurrence. There were also many artificers that were wounded in the process. Not only were conflicts between spirit diagrams and materials common situations, the incompatibility between diagrams were also common. These variations would cause the entire forging process to fail!

“Ah, I had planned to take everyone along to hunt and kill spirit beasts after these two spirit artifacts were forged and earn contribution points. Now that it has failed, my actions would be greatly discounted.” Tu Ze gulped down liquor and said with regret, “Yan Ziqian is going to overtake me.”

“Mn, I heard that Yan Ziqian has been active around Icestone City after breaking into the Natal Opening Realm. He’s already killed two Rank Two spirit beasts. It seems that someone over at Dark Asura Hall has heard his name and noted it down. Being able to be remembered by someone from Dark Asura Hall... is a great honor.”

Chu Peng furrowed his brows. “This will help him out greatly if he plans to enter Dark Asura Hall in the future. The guy really understands when to stand out.”

“Yan Ziqian’s Ice Drake Sword was custom made by Great Master Lu upon request. It is perfectly compatible with the art he cultivates. Before, when he was in the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, I felt very pressed when he fought against me with it. The true power of the Ice Drake Sword could not be displayed when he was in the Refinement Realm, so now that he is in the Natal Opening Realm, it will be even more terrifying.”

Tu Ze’s expression was dark as he inhaled. “In the future, Yan Ziqian will be even harder to deal with. If I do not have an appropriate spirit artifact when I encounter him next time, I will be at a disadvantage...”

When the words came out, everyone’s expressions became grave, their brows tightly furrowed.

Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion’s relationship had always been unfriendly; Tu Ze and Yan Ziqian were arch enemies. The hate between the two flowed deep, and they would explode in a fight if they encountered each other.

In the past, Yan Ziqian’s realm was slightly lower, and he could not truly display the power of the Ice Drake Sword, so Tu Ze was able to stand against him.

Now that both of them were in Natal Opening Realm, the power of the Ice Drake Sword would amplify Yan Ziqian’s power many times over. Without a fitting spirit artifact, Tu Ze would be unable to reach the limits of his art. If he met the present Yan Ziqian, the possibility of defeat was extremely high.

“The Nebula Art that I am cultivating in is the core spirit art that my father used when founding Nebula Pavilion. This art is extremely powerful. When it starts to circulate, it would form clouds of nebulas, and there are many wonders inside. However, the longblade that I use leans towards heat and fire; completely on a different path than my Nebula Art, so it cannot display my art’s true power.”

Tu Ze looked at the defective product and regretfully continued, “There is Stellar Iron mixed into this longblade. It is said that Stellar Iron is from the fragments of stellar

explosions. This is something that can truly help me show the true power of my Nebula Art. If this blade could be forged, I would be completely confident if I had to face Yan Qiqian, but now... ah."

"Big Brother Tu, Sister Qian, I'm curious about artifact forging. Can you let me examine this blade and this whip for a period of time?" requested Qin Lie after being silent for a while.

Tu Ze shrugged and carelessly said, "It's a defective item, and it isn't as fitting as my original one. It's fine if you want to play with it."

"The spirit diagrams have not been completely inscribed, so it isn't really a spirit artifact. Take it, since it is scrap, you can do whatever." Zhuo Qian also expressed her attitude.

"Thanks."

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The next day.

Because Yao Tai was busy repairing spirit artifacts and did not have the time to teach him how to smelt artifacts, his days were very idle.

His contribution points were almost all used up; he could not borrow books from the Scripture Tower or refine his techniques in the cultivation room.

Because of this, there was nothing suitable for him to do at Nebula Pavilion lately.

He used an oilcloth to wrap the Dragon Bone Whip and the longblade before he quietly left Nebula Pavilion and walked towards Li's Shop on Commerce Street.

Recently, after Yan Qingsong and Feng Kai's wounds healed, they had become Yan Ziqian's assistants, due to the threat of spirit beasts, and hunted alongside him. They were extremely well-known at the moment, and even Crimson Fire Association and Water Moon Sect would mention these three people.

As Yan Qingsong and Feng Kai were not in Icestone City, Qin Lie did not need to worry about anything unexpected on the road and felt a bit of regret with how relaxed he was.

"You scamp, you've been in Nebula Pavilion and haven't come for a long time. Are you afraid of those two from Shattered Ice Manor?" When Qin Lie walked in, Li Mu's teasing voice sounded, "I heard that they had a terrible outcome while you didn't end up so bad."

"Uncle Li, how do you know?" Qin Lie was shocked.

“The girl that bought the Spirit Gathering Boards came to the store again. She saw your entire battle and mentioned it to me.” Li Mu smiled. “That girl is very interested in the Spirit Gathering Boards and quoted a price of two Common Grade Seven spirit stones. Do you have any interest in getting some spirit stones?”

“Uh, how many spirit tablets are there that are usable?” Qin Lie asked.

Before he left last time, he had taken many spirit tablets to Nebula Pavilion to practice inscribing the Spirit Storage diagram.

The practice of a new spirit diagram consumed great amounts of materials, so he had already used lots of spirit tablets. Now that Uncle Li mentioned it, he recalled there might not be enough spirit tablets remaining.

“Not many left, just thirty five spirit tablets. If you are going to keep practicing inscribing spirit diagrams, you need to replenish your spirit tablets,” Li Mu said with a smile.

“It seems that I need to earn some more spirit stones.” Qin Lie rubbed his head. He thought and then said, “If I add an Amplification diagram inside the Spirit Gathering Board, the rate at which the energy of the world is being gathered can be doubled. A stronger Spirit Gather Board should be more expensive, right?”

“You scamp.” Li Mu snickered. “Practice as you want. I promise to take care of that and give you a satisfactory price!”

“Thanks, Uncle Li, I’m going back to my room to think about a problem.” Qin Lie’s smile was bright. Taking the oilcloth bundle with the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip, he walked towards the back yard. Just as he was going to leave the shop, he suddenly thought of something. He stopped in his steps and turned his head to look at Li Mu lazing on the chair. In a serious manner, he said, “I also have to thank Uncle Li for your great liquor.”

Finished, he walked out and into the little room in the back.

Chapter 76: Mend

Inside the small house, Qin Lie was touching the longblade with his brows locked together.

The incomplete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside the longblade kept appearing inside his head. It made him incredibly antsy, and he couldn’t help but feel a deep thirst — a thirst to mend that Spirit Gathering spirit diagram.

Dark Asura Hall’s Great Master Lu had already inscribed the main diagram inside the longblade. The main nebula-shaped diagram was located at the core part of the

longblade, and it could activate the star power inside the Stellar Iron to fully grant the longblade a marvellous power.

The Amplification spirit diagram was located inside the nebula diagram, and it was also finished and would increase the speed at which the main diagram's spirit energy ran.

The only problem was that only a very small part of the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was inscribed, so the main diagram inside was unable to draw in spirit energy. This longblade could not even be called a spirit artifact because of this problem.

"Since the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram cannot successfully merge with the main diagram, the main diagram cannot exert its true power. Hence, even if the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was forcefully inscribed inside, this spirit artifact cannot possibly be of high rank..."

These words came from Tu Ze, who answered the crux of the problem and explained why Great Master Lu did not finish the spirit diagram.

Qin Lie pressed a finger against the smooth surface of the longblade, directed a wisp of mind energy and consciousness into its interior, and examined the compound diagram's miraculous designs.

"From the looks of Great Master Lu's Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside Zhuo Qian's Dragon Bone Whip, it should be the same as the incomplete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside this longblade. Compared to the Spirit Gathering I know of, Great Master Lu's Spirit Gathering spirit diagram is simple and friable. Therefore, its Spirit Gathering effects are also... limited."

As Qin Lie continued to ponder, a thought floated in his mind, "Maybe if I mend this with the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram I know of, it may experience a new change?"

His eyes slowly brightened.

He immediately adjusted his breathing and heart rate, cleared out the jumbled thoughts in his head, and slowly sucked in a breath.

The finger pressing against the longblade's broadside abruptly glowed with the light of spirit energy!

Abruptly, his mind and consciousness connected with the spirit diagram inside the longblade. A tiny spot of light abruptly brightened inside the blade's interior world!

The spot of light appeared accurately at the breaking point of the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram.

The glowing spot slowly shifted, and where it had passed through, a new spirit line had clearly appeared on the surface.

Inside the house, Qin Lie had his eyes closed. There were obvious fluctuations of spirit energy around him. His fingertips glowed sharp like a needle as it slid across the blade's surface continuously.

Time passed slowly.

The sweat first appeared on his forehead before it slowly spread all over his entire body. His clothes were quickly drenched, and a trace of sickly white appeared on his ruddy complexion.

His spirit and mind energy were both expended at an unbelievable rate!

“Zzt!”

As if the lights had gone out, the light on his fingertips suddenly disappeared. His body shuddered slightly as he abruptly opened his eyes.

The glowing longblade suddenly dimmed because the light on his fingertips had disappeared, and it now looked no different from common steel.

“S-so this is what you call inscribing diagrams on a spirit artifact...”

Qin Lie was shocked on the inside as he collapsed to the floor covered in sweat and stared blankly at the ceiling.

This was the first time he recognized the huge difference between inscribing a spirit diagram inside an artifact and on a spirit tablet.

To inscribe a spirit diagram inside a spirit tablet was like actually painting with a paint brush. A clear picture could be seen wherever the soft tip of a pen brushed through and ink spilled across the paper. It was an extremely easy and relaxing task that required almost no pause at all, so the person could never get too tired doing it.

But to inscribe a diagram inside an artifact was a completely different sensation. Not only was it not easy at all, it also expended a tremendous amount of mind and spirit energy!

To inscribe inside an artifact was akin to sculpting or carving on top of wood or stone. Not only did it test one's skill and technique, it was also very demanding on one's strength.

The components of an artifact were created through the blending and smelting of spirit materials, and therefore, was much, much tougher than a spirit tablet. The spirit and

mind energy spent during the process of inscribing a spirit diagram was leagues above inscribing on a spirit tablet!

With his current realm and spirit energy, he could very easily inscribe a complete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside a spirit tablet in one go.

However, when he tried inscribing on a real artifact, not only did he nearly expend all of his spirit and mind energy, he had only managed to inscribe one fifth of the entire Spirit Gathering spirit diagram!

“No wonder they said that powerful artificers are often superb martial practitioners themselves. I guessed I finally learned why that was the case today.” Qin Lie’s expression was visibly moved. “Without a deep and refined pool of spirit energy, it would be completely impossible to complete the inscribing of a complex spirit diagram!”

He had already pushed his body past its limits, so he had no choice but to temporarily stop and recover using Spirit Recovering Pills.

“Qin Lie, you have haven’t left your room for a full day, so get out of there right now and make some food! Let’s fill up our bellies first!” Just when his spirit energy had recovered by more than half, Li Mu’s shout came from the outside.

“Yes, I’m coming.” He pushed open the door and walked out.

“What happened?”

The sun was high and bright. A few small dishes were placed on the stone table in the shade of the small courtyard. Li Mu slowly sipped his wine as he frowned at Qin Lie’s appearance.

Qin Lie gave a simple summary of the situation.

Li Mu appeared surprised and also seemed to be more spirited than usual. “You want to mend the spirit diagram of a defective artifact? Pretty interesting. Hm, this will definitely be quite the test of your skills alright. It’s defective anyway, so even if it fails, it doesn’t matter, so sure, go give it a try.” He encouraged him.

Qin Lie sat down, drank some wine with Li Mu, and filled up his belly. He felt that his mood had improved quite a bit.

“Off you go. Do remember to take a small nap first though so you can recover your mind energy,” Li Mu said understandingly.

When he went back into the small house, Qin Lie did not act immediately. Instead, he listened to Li Mu’s advice and went to lie down for a little. When he woke up, he discovered that the sky was already dark, but his mood was in fantastic condition.

So he immediately set to work...

And so, after a couple of periods of on-and-off sessions, on an early morning, he had finally inscribed the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside the longblade.

When he had clearly outlined the final spirit line, the main nebula-shaped diagram inside the longblade was like a galaxy that had been switched on as countless stars began to glitter one after another!

First, Qin Lie slipped a wisp of spirit energy into the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram. The spirit energy was like a river flowing in the diagram's gaps, and after it was slightly enhanced by the Amplification spirit diagram, its flowing even faster until both the spirit threads and the gaps seemed to shine with light...

Finally, the spirit energy was injected into the main diagram, and it caused a huge disturbance to occur inside the nebula-shaped diagram! The main diagram began to operate with extreme fluidity!

Looking at the longblade, one could see that many rice-sized star-like dots began to suddenly and rapidly appear on the blade's surface!

The few hundred star dots clustered together to form a nebula pattern, and the nebula on the surface actually constantly fluctuated and even quietly shifted its position...

At this very moment, it was as if the longblade had come to life!

Qin Lie was absolutely ecstatic. He knew immediately that he had succeeded.

This was because he could very clearly sense that the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram he had inscribed did not conflict at all with the main nebula-shaped diagram when it directed spirit energy.

Not only there was no conflict, it even perfectly merged together and energized the main diagram with incredible effectiveness!

"Uncle Li, I did it, I did it!"

He rushed out of the small house with the longblade in hand and began dancing wildly in the courtyard; he couldn't hold back his joy.

Li Mu walked in from the front of the shop, and with sharp eyes like thunder, he looked at the longblade, grinned, and extended his hand. "Let me have a look."

Qin Lie subsequently handed the longblade over.

Li Mu accepted the longblade and felt it with narrowed eyes. He immediately broke into surprised laughter and yelled at Qin Lie, "My word, kid, are you trying to dominate the other artificer? Why is it that the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram you inscribed has taken in the other artificer's main diagram instead? Originally, the Spirit Gathering and Amplification spirit diagrams were meant to be placed inside the main diagram and act as support."

He held a strange expression on his face as he continued, "But after you tinkered with it, the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram has been expanded at least seven or eight times its original size and wrapped in the other party's Amplification and main diagram instead. Now it looks like your Spirit Gathering spirit diagram is the main diagram, and the rest of his diagrams are just acting as support."

Qin Lie himself was feeling embarrassed. "Even if you add up both that artificer's main and Amplification spirit diagrams together, you couldn't even get seven hundred spirit lines, and they all looked really simple and shoddy. The Spirit Gathering spirit diagram I added on later was formed with more than three thousand spirit threads, and because he had inscribed a rudimentary shape of it later on, I couldn't shrink everything at the early stages and had no choice but to build according to his scale. As a result, well, um, it turned out this way. I didn't really have a choice, you know?"

Normally speaking, a spirit diagram's size can be freely controlled by the artificer.

Take the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram for example. Qin Lie could expand it as wide as ten acres of land or shrink it completely into the size of a palm.

On principle, the power of a spirit diagram had no direct correlation with its size.

That was to say, the effects of a ten-acre-wide Spirit Gathering spirit diagram and a palm-wide Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was exactly the same. They would gather spirit energy only.

If the spirit artifact was larger, then the spirit diagram inscribed would also be larger. If it was smaller, then the spirit diagram must also be shrunk down as well, but the effect of the spirit diagram was still the same.

It didn't matter if it was enlarged or shrunk. This was all done to perfectly fit it with the spirit artifact.

Sometimes, a fine spirit diagram could be harder to inscribe and more testing of the level of an artificer.

It was rumored that a powerful artificer could even inscribe a few composite diagrams in the interior of a small needle.

“Heh, if the original artificer knew that you have turned his main diagram into support, then he’ll probably be mad enough to spit blood.” Li Mu smiled lightly. “On the other hand, it isn’t necessarily a bad thing for this spirit artifact...”

“Li Mu, can this longblade now... be considered a spirit artifact?” Qin Lie’s expression was excited.

“Of course, of course it counts as one. In fact, this is a spirit artifact with a very specific purpose. As for its ranking, it’ll have to be determined through its components and how fast the spirit energy flows, the power it can create, the limits of endurance, and so on. I don’t have any tools here, and only places like Armament Pavilion can lend a professional opinion, so I can’t tell you what rank it is.”

Li Mu stroked his chin and thought for a little while before smiling. “This is definitely a spirit artifact alright, but you did not complete this independently. The majority of its merit is not on you because all you did is repair it at a latter stage. Right, if you want to know how well it performs, you will still have to return this to your friend and let him use his corresponding spirit art to test it out. Only then will you know if it truly suits him or not so you can verify your success.”

“There is still a Dragon Bone Whip with the same problem; the Amplification diagram and main diagram are in conflict with each other.” Qin Lie chuckled.

“Keep up the good work then, and work faster this time since you’ve gained a little experience,” said Li Mu. “I’ll help arrange your meals so you don’t need to worry about it. Just go; I want to see how big of a success you can achieve this time.”

“Uncle Li, thank you,” Qin Lie said sincerely.

“Save it.” Li Mu waved his hands nonchalantly.

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Chapter 77: Trade

With the experience from mending the longblade’s diagram, Qin Lie now had a pretty good idea on what to do when he mended the Dragon Bone Whip.

This time, he consciously organized his time and split the process into five stages. On each stage, he would mend only one fifth of the Amplification diagram, and after using nearly seven days of time, he had finally mended the Dragon Bone Whip’s Amplification diagram completely.

“The main diagram of this Dragon Bone Whip can condense wind energy, and it should be suitable for people who cultivate wind type art formulas. Hmm, wait, that’s not right; there’s also a bit of the flexibility of water. It looks like the spirit art your friend cultivates

is pretty mixed. To mix water in wind, huh? Yeah, I suppose a custom-made spirit artifact is necessary. No wonder your friend would be looking for someone to have it specially made.”

Inside the courtyard, Li Mu held the Dragon Bone Whip Qin Lie had just mended and gave it a casual wave.

There was a sudden gust of wind in the courtyard, and a circle of gray blew over and actually became attached onto the Dragon Bone Whip.

When the Dragon Bone Whip was waved, it drove the thick gray wind to form a wind barrier which encircled the body of the whip.

At first glance, it would seem as if the Dragon Bone Whip had transformed into a Wind Dragon, and it even did all sorts of stunning attacking poses. Moreover, every one of these poses were incredibly lifelike, mimicking the flying jump of a dragon.

“Great show there Uncle Li,” Qin Lie cheered.

“It was only two careless swings, nothing to fuss over,” Li Mu replied in surprise. Then, he returned the Dragon Bone Whip to him and said, “This is the same situation as the longblade; your Amplification spirit diagram has overtaken the others again. Your one Amplification spirit diagram is more complex than the original Artificer’s main diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram, and Spirit Storage diagram put together, so they were all enclosed by your Amplification spirit diagram. Let me put it this way. Your Amplification spirit diagram has become the core of this Dragon Bone Whip, and it has greatly enhanced its ability to condense the power of wind.”

The mended Dragon Bone Whip appeared to be grayish-brown in color. It was slippery to the touch and felt like holding a snake in one’s hands.

Qin Lie really disliked the sensation. “This feels really weird; it’s so slippery to touch and doesn’t really feel comfortable. I wonder if Sister Qian would like it. I sure don’t think much of it personally.”

“The master of the Dragon Bone Whip’s wind type art formula has the power of water inside it, and water is slippery, so she should like that sensation a lot.” Li Mu smiled a little. “The fellow who created this Dragon Bone Whip does have some skill; he had taken the user’s every aspect into consideration. This slippery feeling is a flair of originality deliberately made to fit the user, so you don’t have to worry that your friend won’t like it.”

“Both the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip have had their spirit diagrams mended. But I have to wonder what their ranks are and if Big Brother Tu and Sister Qian could actually use them? I wonder if it could replace the spirit artifacts they’re using right now...” Qin Lie thought silently.

“Oh, right. While you were mending the whip’s diagram, that girl in white and the old servant had come by, and they are still asking about the Spirit Gathering Boards.” Li Mu raised his eyebrows and smiled lightly. “That girl seems to be very concerned about the Spirit Gathering Boards. It is probably because of the Spirit Gathering Board’s ability to gather the world’s spirit energy, and it just so happened that it can help her in some way. She must have a need in this aspect right now, so... she came over and offered a price herself.”

“Oh?” Qin Lie’s expression shook as he smiled, “What price?”

“Three Common Grade Seven spirit stones.” Li Mu chuckled. “I’ve already told her that I would have new stock in a few days, so she should come again pretty soon. Hmm, there’s no need for you to rush back to Nebula Pavilion right now. Go and make some enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Board. There should be no problem at all if we sell it at five Common Grade Seven spirit stones.

“Alright.” Qin Lie nodded his head happily.

Basically, the so-called enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Board was made from adding an Amplification diagram on top of the foundation of the Spirit Gathering Boards.

—For the current Qin Lie, this task wasn’t difficult at all, and it wouldn’t take too much spirit or mind energy to create either.

Therefore, to ensure that he had enough spirit stones to use in the future and to be able to buy more spirit tablets, he temporarily stayed inside the shop and used the remaining spirit tablets to create the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards.

Four days later.

Out of the remaining thirty five spirit tablets, thirty two had been turned into the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards. The remaining three failed after experiencing some minor mistakes when the Spirit Gathering diagram and Amplification diagram were forcefully mixed together.

On the fifth day, the woman in white showed up as expected.

The woman whose clothes were whiter than snow prettily stood in front of the shop and drew a beautiful scenery around her. It was as if the world had suddenly become attractive.

A trace of anticipation leaked from her crystal-like pupils. “Have the Spirit Gathering Boards arrived yet?”

“They’ve arrived.” Li Mu gave a smile and nodded towards the shop at Qin Lie, signalling him to come out and present them.

Both the eyes of the woman dressed in white and the old servant lit up a little. It seemed that they valued the Spirit Gathering Boards greatly, and they both took the opportunity to look towards Qin Lie.

“This is the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards. Compared to the original, this one gathers the world’s spirit energy two times faster!” Qin Lie gave them each a board, then activated the diagrams inside the spirit boards. As it began to glow with a misty blue luster, the world’s spirit energy around them began to flow visibly towards this location.

The amount of nature spirit energy gathered by the two spirit boards was two times faster than what it normally would be in the shop!

Previously, this could only be accomplished through the use of four Spirit Gathering Boards.

“Enhanced version...”

Both the woman dressed in white and the old servant’s eyes grew brighter and brighter. They gave each other a look and appeared to be slightly excited.

Immediately, they too activated the enhanced version of Spirit Gathering Boards in their hands and carefully felt the changes within.

A long time later, the woman in white’s expression turned serious as she exclaimed with a cool voice, “How many spirit stones?”

“Five Common Grade Seven spirit stones!” Qin Lie exclaimed in a low tone and tightened his fists in secret. He was also feeling anxious and was filled with anticipation.

If all thirty two spirit boards could be sold, then it will amount to a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones!

A single Common Grade Seven spirit stone could be exchanged for twenty five spirit tablets, and he could exchange a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones for a total of four thousand spirit tablets!

Four thousand spirit tablets!

When he practiced the Spirit Gathering, Amplification, and Spirit Storage spirit diagrams, he had only spent over a thousand spirit tablets. This meant that if this business was successful, he wouldn’t have to worry about spirit boards for at least one or two years!

“Okay, I’ll take everything!” the woman dressed in white barely gave it a thought before she nodded immediately after. She even added, “How much you have equals to how much I want. As long you have them in stock, I’ll take them all.”

Qin Lie was so excited that his entire body was shaking. Even his gaze on the lady in white had blazed up all of a sudden.

“Ahem!”

Li Mu shot him a glare and scolded him on the inside that the kid was not living up to his expectations. It was only a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones and he was excited to this degree? This was simply too embarrassing.

“For now, this is all we have. It’s not easy for me to come by a shipment, so if you truly have heart, then you may visit often and ask. Who knows, maybe there will be new stock then.”

“Here are thirty two Profound Grade One spirit stones, which is the equivalent of a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones. Please keep it well.”

The old servant pointed towards the table, and crystal clear fist-sized rocks, that were like diamonds, rolled out into the open,

They rolled out before Qin Lie’s eyes.

Each rock was of the same size and possessed a misty glow. When he moved closer, he could see that the rocks were very transparent.

—These were real Profound Grade spirit stones!

These Profound Grade spirit stones were exactly what Manifestation and Netherpassage Realm martial practitioners would use. Spirit stones of this grade were the true currency used by high level forces.

“Qin Lie, do put away the things first,” Li Mu said loudly.

His eyes shining, Qin Lie let out a silly giggle twice before he smilingly put the Profound Grade One spirit stones properly into the cabinet beneath the table.

“If I can create enough enhanced Spirit Gathering Boards, then maybe I can buy myself a spatial ring...” He was already making calculations inside his heart, and with his eyes still sparkling with energy he thought, “Back at Ling Town, that Lu Li from Seven Fiends Valley had carried herself in an arrogant manner and looked down on me. But even she... did not have a spatial ring on her hands, did she?”

"The spirit art you're cultivating is pretty special; it appears to be thunder and lightning. Young man, your special spirit art may be of use to us in certain aspects, are you interested in coming on a trip with us outside the city? Do not worry, I can assure you that it will be much better than working here as an apprentice, and there will be some benefits for you as well," suddenly said the old servant after closely examining Qin Lie.

"Not interested," Qin Lie immediately rejected. In his opinion, creating the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards beats any benefits right now.

"Do you really not want to consider?" The old servant frowned.

"Nope!" Qin Lie affirmed his decision.

"Let's go." The woman in white nodded her head before sweeping a glance over Qin Lie.

Her cool gaze stayed a bit longer at the nebula pattern on the chest area of Qin Lie's clothes before she meaningfully said, "We will meet again very soon." Once she said that, only then did she and the old servant turn around and leave Li's Shop.

"This girl is incredibly beautiful, and her abilities... are just as extraordinary. It also seems that she is slightly interested in the art formula you're cultivating." Li Mu proceeded to curl up atop his recliner again, and he spoke while rocking in comfort, "Are you telling me that you're not interested at all in such a beautiful young lady?"

"No." A gentle and elegant figure quietly appeared in his mind as he shook his head.

"I don't believe you." Li Mu's gaze was teasing. "There are almost no kids in this world who aren't attracted by the other sex. Either you already have someone in your heart or you're abnormal. When your Uncle Li was about your age, hehe, I have zero immunity on this aspect, so I guess I was notorious..."

Qin Lie's interest was immediately piqued as he said full of energy, "Tell me the details!"

"You scamp, you're still telling me you're not interested?" Li Mu looked dumbfounded before he waved his hands. "Now scram. Uncle Li has so many love debts it'll take forever to finish. Too lazy."

"Someone who looks so dirty with a year-long smell like Uncle Li can actually have many love debts?" Qin Lie marveled with a strange expression. "I guess those women who hooked up with Uncle Li should have... quite the heavy taste."

"Cough cough! Cough cough..." Li Mu suddenly coughed loudly as if he had choked on something.

On the same evening, Qin Lie carried the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip in a oilcloth and left Li's Shop for Nebula Pavilion.

"Qin Lie, Elder Han had said to immediately invite you home once you got back!" The guard immediately informed him with a serious expression when he saw him return.

Qin Lie shuddered once, and his eyes abruptly brightened as he thought to himself: Could it be that there is news of Grandpa?

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Chapter 78: Inspector

Qin Lie was full of expectation as he hurried to Han Qingrui's side, a sliver of hope appearing between his brows.

"Qin Lie, you brat, you have finally returned!" exclaimed Han Qingrui who was standing at the door. He seemingly had been waiting specifically for Qin Lie considering that soon as he saw Qin Lie, he immediately became excited and began to shout loudly.

"Uncle Han, is it that there is news of my grandpa?"

"No."

"Then is there mail for me?"

"Nope."

"Then why were you anxiously looking for me?" asked Qin Lie, extremely crestfallen.

"Come in first before we talk," said Han Qingrui with a respectful expression. Only after Qin Lie entered did he whisper, "The Pavilion Master is also here. When you speak, you must be careful."

"Pavilion Master?" asked Qin Lie, his expression slightly changing. "What happened?"

"There is someone who wanted to meet you. This person... is not someone who Nebula Pavilion can slight, and thus, the Pavilion Master personally accompanied them." After Han Qingrui entered the house, he also seemed to have become cautious as he quietly whispered an explanation while he brought Qin Lie to the inner room.

Inside the room, a robust, imposing looking man, upon seeing Qin Lie walking over, smiled as he said, "You must be Qin Lie? I have heard Tu Ze talking about you a lot. Mn, I am Tu Mo."

"Well met, Pavilion Master," replied Qin Lie as he bowed his body in salute.

“You do not need to regard me as a stranger. Come meet our guest from Dark Asura Hall. They specifically wanted to see you.” Tu Mo waved his hand, afterwards, inclining his body to expose the person behind him.

“I said before that we would quickly meet again,” said a clear, cold voice.

A lady clothed in clothes whiter than snow was currently sitting atop Han Qingrui’s usual spot with an indifferent expression.

Her servant with that slouched body, as before, was still standing beside her like a shadow. At this time, he laughed as he observed Qin Lie with relish. “Kid, you are wearing the uniform of Nebula Pavilion, how could you possibly escape from the palms of our hands?”

Qin Lie furrowed his brows.

“This lady is Xie Jingxuan. She hails from Dark Asura Hall,” explained Tu Mo. “She has some things for which she requires your assistance. Mn, you just follow her around for a while. Come back after you finish your job.”

“Dark Asura Hall...” said Qin Lie, pondering over the meaning within Tu Mo’s words. Looking at the white clothed lady, who was called Xie Jingxuan, again, he could only helplessly nod. “Understood. I shall follow Pavilion Master’s instructions and try my best to help her.”

Tu Mo laughed, nodding as he said, “My little brother constantly talks about you and evaluates you highly. Don’t let me down.”

Qin Lie bitterly laughed as he nodded.

“I heard that you are apprenticed at Li’s Shop on Commerce Street, and that Li’s Shop has begun to sell some kind of extremely rare Spirit Gathering Board...” Tu Mo deliberately emphasized a few words before he began to laugh loudly, saying, “Qin Lie, please also help Nebula Pavilion get some Spirit Gathering Boards. Nebula Pavilion will purchase them at the same price.”

Qin Lie was stunned.

“Look, if Nebula Pavilion’s cultivating grounds could be completely full of dense spirit energy of the world, wouldn’t it be very beneficial towards raising the practitioners within the pavilion?” asked Tu Mo, his eyes shining, “That kind of Spirit Gathering Board doesn’t have a great effect towards individuals, but it is extremely suited towards Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor, and other forces of the sort. It can allow the cultivating grounds to rise to a new level.”

“Pavilion Master Tu, I did not tell you about the matter of the Spirit Gathering Boards so that you could fight over the goods with me,” unhappily said Xie Jingxuan, frowning.

“Haha, I was only casually bringing it up so that Qin Lie could watch out for me,” embarrassedly said Tu Mo while laughing loudly.

“You returned very quickly. Mn, thus I will give you two hours of time. After two hours, you will leave with us,” indifferently said Xie Jingxuan as she looked at Qin Lie.

“Okay, I will go now and prepare,” tactfully responded Qin Lie before once again turning to Tu Mo and saying, “About the matter of Spirit Gathering Boards, I will pay attention to it. Once I return, I will talk about it with Uncle Li...” Only then did Qin Lie leave the room.

“Kid, how come you seem so reluctant?” As he had left, Han Qingrui had left with him. Smiling, Han Qingrui patted Qin Lie’s shoulders, asking, “For them to pay attention to you, that is your blessing. You should be happy.”

“What is there to be happy about...” muttered Qin Lie. From his point of view, this time that he was about to spend doing hard work would have been better spent refining a few more Spirit Gathering Boards. Slightly narrowing his brows, he then curiously asked, “What’s her identity and status? Even if she’s someone from Dark Asura Hall, there surely isn’t a need for the Pavilion Master to personally accompany her, right?”

When Xie Jingxuan’s origins were brought up, Han Qingrui’s expression became solemn. He didn’t immediately reply, instead leading Qin Lie along. Only when they arrived at a secluded area did he reply, “Naturally, ordinary people of Dark Asura Hall don’t have the qualifications to control our affairs, and the Pavilion Master wouldn’t bother paying attention to them. However, she... came over with Dark Asura Hall’s Inspector Command Token.”

“Inspector Command Token?” lightly asked Qin Lie.

“The right to dispatch and control people from vassal forces belongs to Dark Asura Hall’s Department of Internal Affairs. With the Inspector Command Token present, she can dispatch the people of Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor, Crimson Flame Association, and Water Moon Sect. As long as it’s a force under the control of Dark Asura Hall, she can directly request and take people.” Han Qingrui laughed bitterly, continuing, “Not just you, even if she wanted me to go along, I would have to as well.”

“Such great authority?” responded Qin Lie, astonished.

“What did you think?” Han Qingrui looked at Qin Lie, then continued, “Otherwise, why would the Pavilion Master have personally come out to receive them? You know, the Pavilion Master’s father... elder brother Tu is the commander of Dark Asura Hall, and thus he himself has a certain status. Many Dark Asura Hall people who come over all

pay their respects to the Pavilion Master. However, Dark Asura Hall's Inspector is a truly powerful figure. Thus, the Pavilion Master couldn't help but do as he was told."

Similar to Nebula Pavilion, the divisions between people within Dark Asura Hall was extremely clear. The only difference was that, rather than calling their ranks Hall Masters, Elders, Vice Pavilion Masters, and Pavilion Master, they called them Generals, Enforcers, Commanders, Five Hall Masters, and Grand Hall Master instead.

Upon entering Dark Asura Hall, one would only be an ordinary General. Only after accumulating a certain amount of merit would they be promoted to the position of Enforcer, then Commander, one of the Five Hall Master, and finally Grand Hall Master.

Inspector wasn't included within these ranks and instead belonged to the Department of Internal Affairs — this was the most peculiar organization of Dark Asura Hall.

The power of Dark Asura Hall's Department of Internal Affairs was comparable to the combined power of Ye Yangqiu and Han Qingrui within Nebula Pavilion. Not only was it responsible for collecting tribute from vassal forces, it was also responsible for controlling the actions of vassal forces.

The position known as Inspector only answered to the Grand Hall Master and was the sharpest, most powerful blade controlled by the Grand Hall Master!

Thus, the Department of Internal Affairs was a very special existence within Dark Asura Hall. The power of the Inspector which came from within was extremely great, and they could even directly kill commanders as well as directly take control of vassal forces' martial practitioners.

After listening to Han Qingrui's explanation, Qin Lie was inwardly shocked. He never expected that the white clothed woman who had frequented Li's Shop and named such a high price for the Spirit Gathering Boards would possess such a background.

"No wonder the servant even has a spatial ring. So that's how it is." Upon understanding the reasons, Qin Lie could only accept his fate. Thinking it over within his mind, he concluded that next time he sold Spirit Gathering Boards upon returning, he would have to slightly raise the price. "What about Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian? I need to find them. I have things to return to them," subconsciously asked Qin Lie, remembering his original purpose.

"They left several days ago, going outside Icestone City to hunt and kill spirit beasts. Kang Zhi and Han Feng also went," explained Han Qingrui. "Ah! The situation outside isn't very good recently. Because the pavilion didn't have enough hands, those brats weren't able to evade their responsibilities and had to expend their energy for the pavilion."

"So it's like that..."

Qin Lie furrowed his brows. He had planned to let Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian test the effects of longblade and Dragon Bone Whip which were currently covered by a oil cloth to see if they would mesh well with their respective weapons. He never expected that the two of them wouldn't be present.

As it was, he had nothing much to prepare. All of his possessions were already all on his person.

"That woman's over here in Elder Han Qingrui's area."

"Is she really that beautiful?"

"Nonsense. I only glanced at her and I can already ensure you that within the entire Icestone City, you will not find a woman more beautiful than her!"

"Then we seriously need to check it out!"

"....."

While Qin Lie and Han Qingrui were having their secluded conversation, a group of several people sneakily walked over, discussing amongst themselves as they shrunk into the corner of a wall nearby and headed towards Han Qingrui's study.

Amongst them was Wei Xing's son, Wei Li, along with a few other arrogant youths of Nebula Pavilion. They all came because of Xie Jingxuan.

"I heard that it's a powerful figure from Dark Asura Hall. Everyone observe from afar and make sure to not say anything. Care for our little lives."

"Understood. Towards someone from Dark Asura Hall, who dares to be rude and waste their life?"

"Mn, just looking is enough."

As the group of youths whispered to each other, they carefully hid themselves, aiming their lines of sight towards the doorway.

"They truly don't know how high the sky is and how thick the earth is," said Han Qingrui, bitterly laughing. Because of their remote location, those several youths had not noticed them. "Luckily, Kang Zhi and Han Feng, those two brats, left long ago. Otherwise, they might also have thoughts along these lines as well. If they got into any trouble, it would truly be hard to clean up," muttered Han Qingrui.

"Han Feng and Kang Zhi are also like this?" asked Qin Lie, laughing.

"They are worse if anything, those two bastards!" snorted Han Qingrui.

After a while, Xie Jingxuan's pure body quietly appeared from the door with the robust and imposing Tu Mo following behind her. As the two talked, they waited at the entrance for something.

When Xie Jingxuan came out, the eyes of Wei Li and the other youths who had shrunk into the corner all looked directly ahead, each pair of eyes showing shock one after the other, as if they had seen the most beautiful person in the world. They all became dazed and at a loss.

"They are waiting for you," said Han Qingrui, chuckling.

"Qin Lie!" Tu Mo's eyes were like a torch as they immediately swept over. Motioning at Qin Lie, he said, "Seeing how relaxed you are, you shouldn't have anything to do. Then, why don't you leave a bit earlier and not have our guests wait on you any longer."

Xie Jingxuan also looked over as she indifferently said, "If there's nothing, then let us leave.

Qin Lie sighed as he helplessly walked out alongside Han Qingrui. While Wei Li and the rest's eyeballs had fallen out, he arrived besides Xie Jingxuan. After thinking for a moment, he took out the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip from within the grease cloth, saying, "Pavilion Master, these are Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's possessions. When they return, please return them for me."

"No need. You can bring them with you," said Tu Mo, slightly distracted. Immediately, he waved his hand, refusing to accept the two as he said, "During your trip... you should encounter Tu Ze and Little Qian. You can give those to them yourself."

"Hn?" Qin Lie's face was full of surprise.

"Ha, you will be fine, just leave with them," said Tu Mo vaguely as he chuckled. He then instructed, "Kid, focus a bit. Don't mess around. This will benefit your future."

"Alright then," responded Qin Lie as he nodded.

"Let's leave," said Xie Jingxuan, furrowing her brows. She seemed impatient as she began to walk directly towards Nebula Pavilion's exit.

"Let's go, kid," snorted the old servant.

Helplessly, Qin Lie, carrying the oilcloth which contained the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip along with a leather bag at his hip, left with the old servant in this manner.

Like an even more minor servant.

However, a look of envy appeared on the faces of Wei Li and the other youths of Nebula Pavilion as their eyes all glowed.

“That guy called Qin Lie, just what kind of lucky dogsheet did he walk through? Why was he specifically picked?” quietly cried one of them.

“The devil knows. It makes me so f*cking upset. Ah! Why couldn’t it be me?”

“He’s only cannon fodder to be sent to his death, hmph!” lowly snorted Wei Li.

As they quietly cried and complained, Pavilion Master Tu Mo had already long since left. From start to finish, he hadn’t noticed they were there.

“What are you all talking about here?” suddenly asked Han Qingrui, his expression cold as he strangely laughed. “Don’t think that you can avoid this, just wait. You all are already on the list. The next request and you all are going out of the city too.

After his remark, the faces of the several youths all became frozen as they began to bitterly beg, begging Han Qingrui to be magnanimous.

“Even Tu Ze has gone into battle. My precious son Han Feng was also dispatched. Do you brats really think you can barely escape it?” snorted Han Qingrui. Curling his lips, he indifferently said, “Let me give you a bit of advice. If you wish to survive longer, you will need to spend more time within the cultivating grounds and less time in places of temptation.”

However, he didn’t tell Wei Li and the rest about just how grim the recent situation outside had become. Nor did he tell them how the death count for Nebula Pavilion was nearing one hundred people as of late.

He was afraid he would scare them.

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Chapter 79: Ghost Bird and Profound Nether Beast

When he walked out of Icestone City and looked into the distance, his expression suddenly turned serious.

There wasn’t a living person to be seen in the usually crowded main street. In fact, when he looked afar, he could see a few skeletal remains.

Some of the bones were somewhat larger and obviously a spirit beast’s. A few of them were distinctively human as well.

The sun was hidden, both sky and earth covered by thick layers of cloud. The land covered in gray and scattered bones depicted a picture of desolation and loneliness.

He could still remember the first time he had arrived at Icestone City. The city gates near the main street were pretty crowded, and there would be numerous martial practitioners and normal men from vassal forces, such as the Ling Family, who would visit Icestone City. Everyday there would be massive traffic at the city gates, and sometimes the sheer number of people entering and exiting the gates could cause a traffic jam.

However, the city gate was completely deserted right now, and not a single soul could be seen on the main street.

“Fwee...”

That old servant, who was called Liang Zhong, suddenly and loudly whistled after he exited the city.

The whistling sound resounded along with the blowing wind into the great distance; its reverberation still echoing.

“Swoosh Swoosh Swoosh!” The flapping sounds of a bird appeared from the thick clouds above their heads.

Qin Lie lifted his head and saw seven to eight birds of the same green color circling above them. Because they were too far apart, he could not clearly identify their shapes, but he did guess that they had come because of Liang Zhong’s whistling.

Liang Zhong lifted his head and let out a chuckle. Then, he whistled again.

A bird suddenly dove downwards like a bolt of green lightning before landing on top of Liang Zhong’s shoulders. It even let out a strange sound as if it were speaking something into his ear.

Qin Lie turned his head to look, slightly started, and softly exclaimed, “W-what kind of a bird is this?”

When it was closer and he could get a clear look at it, he saw that the bird was about the size of his palm, and it glowed faintly green in color. Not only that, its face... was clearly that of a young child’s!

The ghastly green little bird looked like a sinister soul. It had the small face of a child, yet it had a sharp beak and eyes that rolled around freely, giving him a very bizarre and eerie feeling.

“This is a tamed Ghost Bird. They are small creatures that you can find in Nether Battlefield, and they are my eyes.” Liang Zhong gave him a simple explanation before continuing to listen closely at the Ghost Bird’s chirps. It took a while before he finally nodded, and the Ghost Bird abruptly flew away like a wisp of a green ghost, flashing above the clouds in the sky.

“Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh!”

A series of rapid, sweeping sounds came from not too far away. While Qin Lie was waiting, two spirit beasts covered entirely in green scutes suddenly appeared beside Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong like the breeze.

The two spirit beasts shared a very similar aura to the Ghost Bird. It was strange and chilly. Its body covered in green scutes gave it the appearance of a rhino at first glance, but it was even bigger than one, and its eyes were also ghastly green. The mere sight of it sent shivers down people’s hearts.

“Profound Nether Beast, also a spirit beast of the Nether Battlefield. It is very different from those in the Arctic Mountain Range.” Liang Zhong loosely explained, “The Ghost Bird is only a Rank One spirit beast, so its combat capabilities are pretty lacking. But it is incredibly convenient and useful for information gathering and scouting from up in the sky. These two Profound Nether Beasts are only Rank Two, but they run incredibly fast and are the perfect tools for traveling long distances. If you have a Profound Nether Beast to ride on your journey, then it’s but a cinch to travel tens of thousands of miles.”

While he was speaking, Xie Jingxuan’s lithe figure danced upwards like a blade of a willow leaf before landing steadily on top of a Profound Nether Beast.

Liang Zhong himself rode atop the other Profound Nether Beast and nodded towards Qin Lie. “Come on up. You will sit with me.”

Qin Lie obeyed and came over. Grabbing Liang Zhong’s hands, he then sat on top of the Profound Nether Beast.

“Grab my waist,” Liang Zhong exclaimed in a low tone.

Qin Lie cooperated obediently.

“Whoosh Whoosh!”

The Profound Nether Beast beneath him suddenly rushed forward and galloped like a bolt of cold lightning. All Qin Lie could hear was the sound of the wind whipping past his ears, and for a moment, his heart raced.

“Both the Ghost Birds and the Profound Nether Beasts are spirit beasts from the Nether Battlefield. If they had appeared inside Icestone City, it might have caused some panic,

so we left them outside.” Liang Zhong’s explanation came over through the howlings of the wind, and although it wasn’t very loud, Qin Lie could clearly hear every word.

The two Profound Nether Beasts traveled forward with considerable speed. The scenery around them kept flying towards the back as it all quickly passed by.

Gradually, Qin Lie had gotten used to the Profound Nether Beast’s speed, and when he concentrated on the periphery he realized that he could see the occasional traces of battle and the remains of a few spirit beasts. But he seldom saw any corpses of martial practitioners at all.

“The masters of Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley had brought the backbone of their subordinates and are active around the Arctic Mountain Range. Some of their experts have already entered deep into the Arctic Mountain Range and attacked some high rank spirit beasts. The spirit beasts that operate around Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City are usually lower ranked ones - mostly rank one or twos - and the people who were responsible to clean them up were also low level juniors.”

While Liang Zhong was hurrying on his way with Qin Lie, he began to introduce randomly, “The three Elders from your Nebula Pavilion, Du Haitian, Chu Yan, and Wei Xing had brought their hall masters to the edge of the Arctic Mountain Range to combine forces with Crimson Flame Association and Water Moon Sect’s Elders in order to cooperate with Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley’s mission...”

His demeanor was careless, and he just said whatever was on the top of his head without really explaining in great detail, but on the whole, Qin Lie understood what he was saying.

The really high ranking spirit beasts in the Arctic Mountain Range would still be inside the mountain range and the outer edge of the range. Those who went into the Arctic Mountain Range were true masters from Seven Fiends Valley and Dark Asura Hall. The ranks of spirit beasts on the outer edge of the Arctic Mountain Range would be slightly lower - about rank two or so - and Elders from Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Flame Association, and Water Moon Sect would be responsible to hunt them down with their men.

And outside of the Arctic Mountain Range, the spirit beasts that operated around Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City were just rank one or two.

These low level spirit beasts would fall under the responsibility of Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, Yan Ziqian, and other juniors to bring some allies of the Refinement Realm to clear them out.

“I don’t see many bodies of martial practitioners?” Qin Lie suddenly asked after the Profound Nether Beast sped along for a little while.

“The reason there aren’t many martial practitioner corpses isn’t because we’re holding an advantage, but rather... those who died were usually torn apart and eaten by spirit beasts which is why you don’t see many corpses around here.” Liang Zhong frowned. “To those spirit beasts, a martial practitioner’s body is a great nourishing medicine. They find the flesh and blood forged out of the concentrated spirit energy of the world extremely tasty, and it can also increase both their strength and ranks. To them, our corpses carry a similar effect to spirit pills.”

“Many people had died?” Qin Lie’s expression changed slightly.

“Nebula Pavilion has lost over a hundred men, and both Shattered Ice Manor and Water Moon Sect have experienced similar losses. Crimson Flames’ are a bit worse...” Liang Zhong looked into the distance and indifferently said, “It was a spirit beast that was close to breaking through to Rank Three. It broke through the defensive line at the outer edge of the Arctic Mountain Range and entered the perimeter around Crimson Flame City. Crimson Flame Association had been careless and did not send out a true expert to hunt it down, and it caused a few squads to be annihilated which resulted in the death of tens of people.”

Qin Lie was moved on the inside.

“Because they didn’t move into the city early on, the vassal forces of Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon Sect also lost a few hundred men.” Liang Zhong then said, “It is perfectly normal for people to die. Every year there are countless Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners who lose their lives, so this is hardly surprising at all. It would be a real surprise if no one died.”

The strange chirps of the Ghost Birds suddenly rang out from above the sky, and one of them suddenly dropped down and landed on Liang Zhong’s shoulders.

The two Profound Nether Beasts simultaneously slowed down .

After listening for a while, Liang Zhong looked to the left, and with a slight frown, said, “Miss, there is a Rank Two Golden Crag Beast operating in a village in that direction.”

“Is there anyone else left in the village?” Xie Jingxuan asked.

“There is.” Liang Zhong nodded.

“Haven’t we sent out a notice for Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon Sect to move their vassal forces into the city? Why are there still people outside?” Xie Jingxuan seemed to be suppressing her anger as she said that.

“Some people decided to leave it to chance and believed that their own village would not be invaded by spirit beasts. Some people are old, and it could be that they didn’t feel like moving anymore, or they couldn’t move in time...” Liang Zhong explained.

“Let’s give it a look.” Xie Jingxuan let out a soft sigh.

The two Profound Nether Beasts abruptly changed directions, and soon, they were moving fast once more. An hour later, they had arrived at a very secluded village on top of their Profound Nether Beasts.

The village had only about twenty households, and at first glance, the place was completely dead with no sound of life whatsoever. The fields had been abandoned long ago, and they were overgrown with weeds.

A Ghost Bird landed on top of a southeastern household from the sky.

The Profound Nether Beasts rushed towards that direction.

A thick scent of blood hung in the air, and there were pools of blood all over the ground. But there were no bodies.

It took only one look for Qin Lie to come to the realization that there were people who stayed behind in these households, and they were all eaten by the Golden Crag Beast which was why there were no corpses to be found.

“We were late.” Liang Zhong shook his head, called his Ghost Bird over again, and asked for a moment before saying, “The Golden Crag Beast had left and entered a natural stone forest towards the front. The stone forest is situated almost at the center of the area between Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon city. It is dozens of miles wide, and there was a lot of spirit beast activity in the area. Many juniors would hunt for beasts there, so it is quite the lively place.”

“Let’s go.” Xie Jingxuan’s expression was indifferent, and after a slight nod, she led the way with her Profound Nether Beast and left this desolate village.

“Hmm, if there are no surprises, then this Tu Ze and his group that you’re looking for should be inside that stone forest,” said Liang Zhong after releasing his Ghost Bird.

Qin Lie’s brows lifted slightly, and he unconsciously felt for the oilcloth that contained the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip, asking, “Why did you specifically seek me out? Exactly how am I going to be able help you?”

“I’m not certain if you’re able to help us.” Liang Zhong looked deeply towards him and gave it some thought before speaking, “If you are able to summon the thunder from Ninth Heaven just like that day on the stone bridge, then you will be of help. Otherwise, it will have been a mistake to bring you along, and you will become a completely useless burden.”

The moment the words came out, Qin Lie’s eyebrows became locked in a deep frown as he spoke bluntly, “Then I will tell you right now that you are going to be disappointed.

I am unable to summon the power of thunder again. It was just an accident last time, and... you have thought too highly of me.”

When he fought against Feng Kai on the stone bridge, during a dangerous moment he had miraculously attracted lightning to fall from the sky and dealt Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong severe injuries.

Since then, he had immersed himself for a few days to see if he could cause lightning to fall once more.

He had not succeeded once ever since.

Therefore, he had categorized that particular success as a miracle.

And since it's a miracle, then naturally it could not possibly happen every time, and it wasn't something that would come just because he wanted it to.

“Oh, really?” With narrowed eyes, Liang Zhong curled his lips into a smile, but the smile seemed a little off. “Then maybe, you'll be able to surpass your limits under the threat of death.”

He slapped Qin Lie's shoulders, and ignoring the fact that his face had lost all color, Liang Zhong continued to speak with a smile, “Ready yourself to face death firsthand, kid.”

Chapter 80: The Leaders of the Four Sides

The natural stone forest covered over tens of miles and was situated in between Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City.

Countless rock formations of different shapes and sizes stood inside the stone forest, and its terrain was fairly complex, making it pretty easy to hide one's trail. Spirit beasts took to this place like ducks to water, so it was harder than usual to hunt them down.

The spirit beasts that had stepped out of the Arctic Mountain Range were operating around the border of the three cities. The moment they suffer a loss when fighting against the martial practitioners and found the situation unfavorable, they would often choose this forest of stone as the place to escape to.

Over time, this natural stone forest became their most favored sanctuary.

Martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Fire Association, and Water Moon Sect were initially unfamiliar with the stone forest and thus suffered a great number of losses inside, losing quite a few people.

Gradually, they realized that the spirit beasts loved to escape into the stone forest and thus began to treat the matter with seriousness.

All four martial practitioner forces shifted their true attention to the stone forest and explored the terrain seriously. Area after area they invaded to make preparations for the gradual extermination of the spirit beasts that had gathered inside.

As the number of martial practitioners from all four powers increased, they slowly gained the initiative.

Humans were smarter, after all, and once they had researched the terrain completely, they would make arrangements beforehand and prepare all sorts of traps and ambushes.

With these advantages, the martial practitioners from the four forces had been able to make significant progress hunting spirit beasts as of late. Almost everyday spirit beasts would be flushed out and killed, and a lot of people who had tasted blood also rushed over when they heard of news from this region.

This was because everyone knew that there were many spirit beasts inside the stone forest and that occasionally there would be new spirit beasts that would enter the fray, so they all wanted to come here to hunt down spirit beasts to obtain spirit materials and beast cores and also accumulate contribution points.

Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, Yan Qingsong, and others from Shattered Ice Manor; Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, Kang Zhi and others from Nebula Pavilion; and even Xiong Ba from Crimson Flame Association and Na Nuo from Water Moon Sect were operating inside this natural stone forest. Everyone had the same idea of reaping great rewards inside this stone forest.

Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba and Water Moon Sect's Na Nuo were both leaders of the young generation with fame no less than Yan Ziqian and Tu Ze themselves. They were all great leaders of the future.

"Sssssssss!"

A Golden Crag Beast became covered in flames, fiery sparks flying off its stone-like body as it roared in pain.

There was a young man about two meters tall wearing a martial practitioner garment bearing his arms. He had bulging muscles covering his entire body and looked as stout as a human bear. With a grin, he let out a weird chuckle and was doing his best to hunt down this Golden Crag Beast with a few martial practitioners from Crimson Flame Association in golden color martial practitioner dress.

This unsightly, inhuman-looking fellow, with an extremely huge body, was the one who had let loose those shots of fire.

He held a golden spear in his hands and continuously swallowed and spat out flames while fighting the Golden Crag Beast head on, whereas the other Crimson Flame martial practitioners had spread out to coordinate with him and attacked the beast from both sides. It was slowly losing its strength.

The young man who was like a man-bear was, of course, Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba, and at first glance, his battle against the Golden Crag Beast did not look like a battle between man and beast.

—It looked more like two wild beasts tearing, biting, and tangling with each other.

“Savage Xiong, why don't you give me the Golden Crag Beast's eye? I'll exchange it with the horn of a Dragonhorn Rhinoceros.”

A beautiful young girl dressed in a bright yellow tight suit looked leisurely in his direction with six or seven equally young and beautiful women beside her.

The girl in the bright yellow tight suit looked to be about eighteen or nineteen years old. She was tall and lanky, her breasts full and firm with a pair of long legs and an attractive face.

A lifelike rainbow-colored spirit snake was drawn on her white left arm. She even bared her left arm intentionally so it would appear as if a rainbow-colored serpent was encircling it, causing people to feel fear from the bottom of their hearts with just a glance.

“Na Nuo, do you really think I'm stupid? How can the horn of a Dragonhorn Rhinoceros compare to the Golden Eye of a Golden Crag Beast? Besides, I have no use for the horn at all, so why would I trade for it?” The moment Xiong Ba opened his mouth again, it was like the rumblings of thunder, “Last time I traded with you, I almost got beaten to death by my father! I will never ever trade any spirit materials with you again!”

“Hehe, I was just playing with you last time! I definitely won't deceive you this time.” Na Nuo giggled non-stop, and she was laughing so hard her snake-like waist couldn't even straighten anymore. The girls from Water Moon Sect behind her were also covering their mouths and laughing non-stop, and the more they thought about that incident, the funnier it seemed.

“Like hell I'll believe you!” Xiong Ba humphed with a livid expression and ignored Na Nuo. He began bloodily dissecting the Golden Crag Beast with his equally rugged-looking brothers.

"How boring." Na Nuo glanced once at the bloody scene and frowned. "The fellows from Crimson Fire Association are a bunch of beasts wearing human skin after all. I suppose Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion are still the more interesting ones. But, sigh, such a shame that that Tu Ze is a coward. Yan Ziqian has already provoked him several times, but he just endured it all the way. He really makes people worry for him."

"Sister Na Nuo, Tu Ze is being tactful." A girl behind her seemed to have good feelings for Tu Ze and his men; thus, she could not help but defend them. "The Ice Drake Sword Yan Ziqian is wielding was tailor made for him by Dark Asura Hall's Master Lu, and when combined with the spirit art he's cultivating, its power is simply astounding. Tu Ze can't fight him, and Zhuo Qian also can't defeat Feng Kai, so of course they're going to avoid them for now. If they really went and risked their lives instead, then wouldn't he be as stupid as Xiong Ba?"

"You stinkin' brat, don't tell me you've fallen for Tu Ze?" Na Nuo turned around and punched her once, teasing, "So Little Sparrow is lusting for a man. Do you want me to make a match between the two of you?"

"What nonsense are you talking about, I'll pinch you to death!" The girl who was called a little bird fooled around with Na Nuo with a tiny blush on her face.

Na Nuo and the girls from Water Moon Sect began to fool around inside the stone forest. Giggling and running about, they were like a group of larks painting a beautiful scenery into existence.

"Ahem, Na Nuo."

It was at this moment Yan Ziqian came over with his men from Shattered Ice Manor. Beside him were Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong.

They all wore bright silver clothes, and everyone one of them appeared to be smart and handsome. Their appearances were far, far better than those of Crimson Flame Association's, so the moment they came over, the girls of Water Moon Sect quickly stopped their game of pursuit and began to feign gentleness and innocence like sheltered young ladies.

"What are you calling me for?" Na Nuo stopped fooling around and smiled prettily at Yan Ziqian, saying, "Aren't you keeping an eye on Tu Ze everyday to be ready to interrupt their good fortune at any moment? Why did you come find us instead?"

Lately, Yan Ziqian and his gang had been keeping a tight watch on Tu Ze, and the moment they found that they were hunting spirit beasts, they would immediately join the fray and forcefully claim that they were the ones who found the spirit beasts first before robbing them of spirit materials by force.

At first, both sides had clashed with each other several times, and quite a number of people were injured from those clashes.

However, those who had been injured were mostly on Tu Ze's side. Kang Zhi and Han Feng were bloody and Zhuo Qian's arm was still somewhat unusable after it was stabbed once by Feng Kai's sword.

But the one who suffered the most was still Tu Ze. He had three wounds on his chest, and it seemed like they hadn't completely healed yet.

—They were all wounds given by Yan Ziqian.

After suffering a few losses, Tu Ze and his men had no choice but to swallow their anger and do their best to avoid conflict with Yan Ziqian and the others. Even if they were provoked, they had to grit their teeth and pretend they heard nothing.

There were a few martial practitioners from Dark Asura Hall who were taking charge in this stone forest, and it was because of them that Yan Ziqian didn't dare to act too wantonly and do everything in their power to kill Tu Ze. That was why Tu Ze and the others were still around.

But Tu Ze's condition in the stone forest was downright terrible due to the existence of Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian...

"Tu Ze?" Yan Ziqian laughed coldly. "That cowardly fellow only knows how to run and hide, giving me no chance to end him once and for all. If it weren't for the people from Dark Asura Hall, those bastards... Hmph!"

"Oh, so you were this powerful then?" Na Nuo's smile was playful. "Why don't you go play a bit with Savage Xiong then? I do still know him quite well; if you harass him, then he would definitely not run away. Look, Savage Xiong and his buddies are dissecting a Golden Crag Beast right at the front. Why don't you go and rob them?"

The girls from Water Moon Sect behind her began to giggle as well, and a few energetic ones even led with a shout, "C'mon, go fight them! If you're really so powerful, then go fight Savage Xiong! I wonder who among you is more fearsome? I, I love aggressive men, and I love watching fights the most."

A girl made a look of absolute infatuation and loudly urged them on as if she couldn't wait to see the world burn.

The moment Xiong Ba was brought up, Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong's faces shook and appeared a bit awkward.

It wasn't as if they were afraid of Xiong Ba and his gang if they had really gotten into a fight. It was just that Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba was famous for his

fearlessness towards death, and if they really did fight, Xiong Ba would go absolutely crazy and wouldn't stop until one of them was dead — he was someone who would dare to go against even Dark Asura Hall's orders.

Yan Ziqian wouldn't dare to provoke such a mad dog without a good reason, so he laughed awkwardly, "Shattered Ice Manor has no conflict with Crimson Flame Association and there is no grudge between us, so obviously we have no reason to fight each other."

Seeing that he hadn't fallen into her trap, Na Nuo disinterestedly said in a perfunctory tone, "Then what is it you came to me for?"

"We found three Rank Two spirit beasts, but we're not sure we can take them on all by ourselves, so we're inviting you girls into the group to work together. I wonder if you're interested?" Yan Ziqian told her the reason they came over.

"Three Rank Two spirit beasts?" Na Nuo's eyes brightened as she nodded. "Yes I am. But how are we going to split the loot? How many beasts do you want?"

"We'll split by whoever put in the most effort. What do you think?" Yan Ziqian asked.

"Sure." Na Nuo might have appeared casual, but her words were very sharp. "I doubt you have the guts to snatch my prey from my hands!"

"Hehe, and why would we snatch anything from a beautiful lady? We're gifting you stuff on our own will, okay?" Yan Qingsong laughed loudly. "Follow me, I'll bring you over right now. I personally love to share the good stuff with beautiful girls."

After that, the girls from Water Moon Sect giggled and, under Na Nuo's lead, followed Shattered Ice Manor's men into the stone forest.

On the other side.

Tu Ze leaned against a stone pillar with his chest wrapped in bandages. With a heavy expression, he said, "We were the ones who found those three Rank Two spirit beasts first, but we can't handle them the way we are. It's fine that Yan Qingsong sees it, we'll just let them busy themselves with the task. We'll admit our loss this time and regain our pride in the future."

"Sigh, if our spirit artifacts had been successfully created, what would we have to fear of Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai?" Zhuo Qian's eyes were dark.

"There's no point talking about this now. A loss is a loss. We can only endure this for the moment and talk about it later." Tu Ze let out a sigh. "Let's get through this period of time first, and when I get back, I will gather the spirit materials and request Great Master Lu's help once more!" His eyes were red as he yelled, "I refuse to accept that my luck

will continue to stay bad! When I finally get my spirit artifact, I will immediately seek out Yan Ziqian and obtain our revenge!”

The moment he said that, Zhuo Qian the others to grit their teeth, looking like they were about to eat someone alive. It looked like that had been thoroughly oppressed by Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the others.

They did not notice that, while they were swearing solemn oaths, there was a Ghost Bird flying atop their heads.

The Ghost Bird flew out of the natural stone forest and arrived at its entrance. It dropped onto Liang Zhong’s shoulder, and after listening to it for a while, Liang Zhong said, “These pair of eyes have helped me find Tu Ze.”

Qin Lie’s expression shook atop the Profound Nether Beast, and he unconsciously touched the oilcloth wrapping the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip. He was filled with anticipation.