

Stronger 51

Chapter 51: Conical Hat Strange Guest Stuns Great Marsh, Manluo Demon Pearl Seeks Flying Thief_2

Upon arriving at the council meeting hall, he discovered that most of the Stewards were already seated in their respective positions.

Sitting down on his own seat at the back, Lin Xuankong looked at Han Lu not far away. "Steward Han, do you know why everyone has been summoned here?"

Han Lu, holding a cane, looked mysterious. "HEH HEH, you'll find out soon. It's a big deal!"

Lin Xuankong was speechless. Seeing Han Lu's smug expression that practically screamed 'I know, but I won't tell you,' he suddenly felt that his leader, Ma Jiang, should be stricter with this disciple. Even if his leg was injured, he could still train his chest and back for endurance!

Moments later, all the Stewards were present.

Jiang Yuran, dressed in a Moon White Daoist Robe, walked out from the back hall with several Grand Chief Stewards. "Yesterday's search task was assigned. How is the progress? From now on, everyone needs to report daily! Esteemed Stewards, let's begin!"

Ma Jiang was the first to stand up. "Reporting to the Chief Steward, I have begun a detailed inspection of the residents' homes within the stronghold. Yesterday, we went through 1,840 households. In addition, I assigned Steward Lin to inspect the blacksmith shops and Martial Arts Halls. Last evening, his subordinate Li Er reported back, and no anomalies have been found yet."

Next, the other Stewards reported their arrangements, which were broadly similar to Ma Jiang's, though their progress was slightly slower.

However, Zhao Yufei, with the assistance of her Dragon Blood Dog, had progressed much faster than Ma Jiang. She had already inspected all the residences near the stronghold but had found nothing significant. Lin Xuankong had already found clues about the Flying Thief within the Black Tiger Gang's territory, so naturally, Zhao Yufei could not have found anything.

After listening to everyone's report, Lin Xuankong silently shook his head, thinking:

The Stewards of the Yin Talisman Sect each have hundreds of people under their command, mobilizing thousands in total. But even so, it would take at least nearly twenty days to thoroughly inspect the entire Great Marsh Prefecture! The key issue is the obstacles they'll face in the territories of other factions and clans, meaning the actual time needed to inspect the entire Great Marsh Prefecture City will be even longer! Considering this, my Manluo Demon Pearl is far more effective. It 'searched' the entire Great Marsh Prefecture in just a few hours. After today's meeting ends, I can go out and cover a large part of the Outer City!

Jiang Yuran listened to the eight Stewards' reports and nodded approvingly towards Zhao Yufei.

"Everyone's actions were very quick and efficient. Especially Steward Zhao Yufei, who used the Dragon Blood Treasure Dog, nurtured at great expense by her family, to search for the Flying Thief. It played an extremely astonishing role in this inspection! For the upcoming inspections, remember, you must not overlook any place where the Flying Thief could hide!"

Many Stewards rose and responded in unison, "Yes, Chief Steward!"

The praised Steward Zhao Yufei appeared confident, her face a mask of cold arrogance.

She glanced across the crowd. With the help of the Dragon Blood Dog, combined with the cooperation of Xu Bei and others, attaining the rank of Silver Jade Steward should be as easy as taking something from her own bag!

At this moment, a slight smile appeared on Jiang Yuran's face.

"Additionally, I have an interesting piece of major news to share. Last night, that Conical Hat Strange Guest appeared again. It's said he caused quite a stir at the residence of Deputy Steward Zhang Wu of the Black Tiger Gang. Using that famed Twin Vine Demon Pearl, he crippled Zhang Wu! What's more interesting is that the Conical Hat Strange Guest, in front of many Black Tiger Gang members and leaders, abducted Zhuo Yunbing, the concubine Zhang Wu was about to marry, effectively giving Zhang Wu a big green hat. He even left a message saying that he will definitely kill Zhang Wu and that Zhang Wu should wait slowly for his death. Hmm, quite arrogant and with a unique style!"

As she said this, her smile became more pronounced. "The Black Tiger Gang is rife with scoundrels who hoard medicinal materials and act lawlessly. Now, they've had their own nest raided and completely ransacked. Tell me, isn't that amusing!"

Hearing this, most of the Stewards began to laugh.

In the last great battle with the Black Tiger Gang, the Yin Talisman Sect had suffered heavy losses, leaving everyone feeling frustrated. Now, unexpectedly, the Conical Hat Strange Guest had managed to make the mighty Black Tiger Gang look utterly pathetic, causing them to lose immense face in front of countless Martial Cultivators in Great Marsh Prefecture.

The red-faced Steward spoke up, "This Conical Hat Strange Guest certainly is an interesting and peculiar individual. I just wonder how strong he truly is."

Ma Jiang, looking pleased as he idly rolled the dice in his hand, said, "Steward Zhang, you're mistaken! With the Twin Vine Demon Pearl in hand, one can be invincible against those of the Same Tier and can even challenge stronger opponents from higher tiers. Coupled with the Conical Hat Strange Guest's exceptionally skillful hidden weapons, with abilities like these, wouldn't that be considered formidable strength?"

Another Steward stated with conviction, "In my opinion, this Conical Hat Strange Guest must be at least a Fourth or Fifth Layer master. Otherwise, how could a Low-tier Martial Cultivator dare to provoke the Black Tiger Gang!"

"HA HA HA, regardless of his Realm, from today onwards, the name of this Conical Hat Strange Guest will be known by everyone in Great Marsh Prefecture!"

"More than just known by everyone! I don't know how many Martial Cultivators who were bullied by those Black Tiger Gang scoundrels are clapping their hands and cheering right now!"

"I'd truly love to see the expressions on the faces of those high-and-mighty Stewards in the Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall right now, facing the Conical Hat Strange Guest's attacks and provocations! HA HA HA!"

At this moment, these high-ranking Stewards of the Yin Talisman Sect were all quite surprised and delighted.

The theft from their warehouse had caused the Yin Talisman Sect to lose significant face. Now, a Deputy Steward of the Black Tiger Gang had been publicly threatened, and the perpetrator had escaped unscathed. The Black Tiger Gang had lost even more face. Seeing their enemy in a worse situation naturally lifted their spirits.

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The Stewards only wished that the Conical Hat Strange Guest would cause trouble for the Black Tiger Gang every day...

Only Zhao Yufei, sitting to one side, remained silent, but her eyes already held a glint of eagerness.

The Conical Hat Strange Guest had appeared again! He had been to Zhang Wu's residence. She wondered if there was a chance to find something the Conical Hat Strange Guest had left behind, or traces of him there!

Although the Conical Hat Strange Guest had many tricks, he didn't understand her Celestial Eye Technique. If she suddenly faced him, there was a good chance she could capture him and get the Twin Vine Demon Pearl in his possession!

...

After the meeting, in the inner hall of the council chamber, several Grand Chief Stewards looked at Jiang Yuran.

Grand Chief Steward Gao Yunchao spoke, "Should we gather the manpower from the Outer City first to speed up the investigation?"

Jiang Yuran, clearly in a good mood because of the Conical Hat Strange Guest matter, smiled and shook her head.

"No need. The defense of the Outer City is also very important. Let's try to expedite the progress. If we can avenge the disciples as soon as possible, that would be best!"

"Moreover, didn't Zhao Yufei acquire three Dragon Blood Dogs? With those three Dragon Blood Dogs, the search for the Flying Thief will proceed much faster! It's estimated that we will have some clues in seven or eight days!"

Gao Yunchao's eyes flickered. "So, Chief Steward Jiang believes that the Silver Jade Steward position is highly likely to fall into Steward Zhao Yufei's hands?"

Jiang Yuran laughed. "Of course. Zhao Yufei's chance of getting the Silver Jade position is definitely dozens or even hundreds of times greater than any other Steward. After all, this talented young lady from the Zhao Family has the Dragon Blood Dogs to assist her! Though she's a bit arrogant, she is truly deserving of the Silver Jade Steward position based on her strength, talent, and background. Speaking of which, even Hall Master Senior Brother Xuu thinks highly of her and wants my martial nephew to marry her!"

Jiang Yuran paused, then continued, "Additionally, there is one more thing. That Conical Hat Strange Guest rescued Zhuo Yunbing, who should be the very Zhuo Yunbing from the Alchemy Zhuo Family that has somewhat declined! Although Zhuo Yunbing's skill in refining the Divine Protection Elixir is far inferior to the Pill Masters of our Great Marsh Hall, she is still a somewhat talented Initial Grade Alchemist. If we can find her, it would be good to bring her into our sect!"

Thinking of this, Jiang Yuran secretly thought: If I can find Zhuo Yunbing, I might also get some information about the Conical Hat Strange Guest from her. Such an interesting person, it would be best to draw him into our Yin Talisman Sect...

...

「A few hours later,」

Near Xunyang Town in the Outer City, a figure swiftly moved through the area. It was Lin Xuankong, activating the Manluo Demon Pearl.

He stood on a small hill he had once visited, looking into the distance. He saw numerous lush green fields outside Xunyang Town, where several tenant farmers were busy with their work... Even though the battle between the Yin Talisman Sect and the Demons had caused countless Yin Talisman Disciples to perish, it also brought new life.

After a few glances, Lin Xuankong turned his gaze towards the direction of the Black Tiger Gang's Outer City territory.

With the Manluo Demon Pearl, he had already searched the territory of the Spirit Snake Gang and thoroughly investigated the twenty-nine towns under the Yin Talisman Sect. Next, he planned to head towards the Outer City towns of the Black Tiger Gang, hoping to find some results there!

After a brief rest, Lin Xuankong set off again, running swiftly across the plains.

Three cups of tea time later, Lin Xuankong suddenly stopped because at that moment, the Manluo Demon Pearl he had activated caused the Manluo Demon Grass to rapidly extend, heading towards the west!

Staring at the rapidly extending Manluo Demon Grass, Lin Xuankong's face showed a hint of surprise. The Manluo Demon Grass appeared slender and delicate, but its extending speed was terrifyingly fast. It was countless times faster than him running at full speed as a late-stage Second Layer Martial Cultivator. His current vision far surpassed that of ordinary people, yet he could only see the afterimages of the Demon Grass's top tendrils... If this speed were used to chase him, even if the Demon Grass let him run a hundred thousand feet first, he wouldn't be able to escape!

Of course, most importantly, he finally found the hideout of the two Flying Thieves!

Suppressing his excitement, Lin Xuankong's face turned cautious. He quieted his steps and moved quickly under the cover of the vegetation... Two hundred precious Forehead Scales, medicinal herbs from the Honorary Silver Jade Position, and the Thunder Light Flashing Yin Talisman Technique, here I come!

Chapter 53: There's Always Someone Stronger

In the mountain forest, inside a dilapidated temple, two black-clad, masked Martial Cultivators sat on the fallen head of a deity statue, looking toward the entrance of the ruined temple.

One man, broad-shouldered with phoenix eyes, spoke, "Damn it, what bad luck! In the third warehouse of the Yin Talisman Sect, there wasn't a single herb for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup. If I had known, I wouldn't have taken such a big risk!"

The slender man responded, "Second Brother, why dwell on it! With our Late Stage Second Layer cultivation and expert Darts Skill, not even the esteemed Stewards and Deputy Stewards of the Yin Talisman Sect and the Black Tiger Gang can stop us. Once we leave Great Marsh Prefecture, with our strength, we'll find a good path anywhere!"

The man with phoenix eyes frowned. "The Yin Talisman Sect has gone all out. We don't know when we'll be out of danger!"

The slender man knit his brows. "So what if the Yin Talisman Sect has gone all out? If it weren't for hearing that Zhao Yufei used the Dragon Blood Treasure Dog, we wouldn't have had to flee to this desolate countryside. We would have long gone to Qiuyu Tower to enjoy the top entertainers! Damn it, when I reach Perfection in the Third Layer, I'm going to sleep with that slut Daoist Nun Zhao Yufei, and we'll share her—me first, you next!"

The man with phoenix eyes furrowed his brows tightly. Third Layer Perfection? Easier said than done. He and his Big Brother had cultivated hard for eighteen years, yet only reached the Late Stage of the Second Layer. Even aiming for Second Layer Perfection would take another one or two years! As for the Third Layer... Though such cultivation speed is already top-notch among Independent Martial Cultivators, it's still far, far from sleeping with the beautiful Daoist Nun Zhao Yufei! Although, the goal does sound enticing and arousing!

He shook his head, dispelling the images and wild thoughts from his mind. "Big Brother, are you sure the buyer you contacted is reliable? Two hundred and ten complete Essence Blood Pearls, two hundred precious Forehead Scales, plus other supplies, all for just two hundred sets of Qi Replenishing Soup herbs—that's too cutthroat!"

The slender man said, "Nowadays, the price of Qi Replenishing Soup herbs in Great Marsh Prefecture has skyrocketed. Plus, our goods are hot and illegal. Getting two hundred sets is already very good!"

At this moment, footsteps sounded outside the temple.

A nine-foot-tall, extremely burly man entered, wearing a Black Iron Mask. Some knotted black beard was visible on either side of the mask. In his extremely broad hands, he held a large wooden box.

Entering the ruined temple, he spoke in a deep voice, "You two from the Tao Family certainly know how to pick a spot. This place is right next to the Demon Fox's territory, where the Black Tiger Gang rarely patrols!"

"Where's the medicine?" The slender man, upon seeing the masked man, involuntarily reached for the dart pouch at his waist.

"Here it is!" The masked man waved his hand and opened the box.

The wooden box opened, revealing various herbs for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup. A strong medicinal aroma immediately filled the surroundings.

The slender man's eyes gleamed at the sight of the herbs. "Friend, you're quite capable, managing to get two hundred sets in Great Marsh Prefecture where herbs are so scarce!"

"Where are the goods!" the masked man ignored his chatter.

The slender man smiled. "I'll get them for you right now..."

He took a single step forward but suddenly felt dizzy. His expression changed as he recalled the medicinal scent he had just smelled.

His face fell, and he shouted, "No, there's Enchanting Fragrance! Damn it, masked man, you tricked me!"

Not daring to be careless, he circulated his Qi Blood frantically to suppress the poison of the Enchanting Fragrance while simultaneously waving his hands. A barrage of darts, whistling sharply, flew towards the masked man. The phoenix-eyed man beside him also launched his darts in a rapid series.

The air in the ruined temple instantly filled with the sound of darts piercing through the air, cold light flashing. Their Darts Skill was far superior to that of Hu Lin from the Black Tiger Gang, whom Lin Xuankong had killed. Each time they raised their hands, four darts flew out simultaneously, as fast as lightning! An ordinary Early Stage or Mid-grade Second Layer Martial Cultivator facing such terrifying Darts Skill would undoubtedly be killed or severely injured!

The masked man, however, extended silver claws over a foot long from his palms. He moved his hands so quickly they formed an impenetrable barrier, warding off countless darts as he walked toward the two men, laughing loudly. "As expected of seasoned veterans, your reactions are quick! But so what if you detected the Enchanting Fragrance? With your Late Stage Second Layer cultivation, how could you possibly be my match!"

"Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw! You bastard, you're from the Black Tiger Gang!" The phoenix-eyed man's face paled.

"We've traded so many times, and you never noticed, did you? Quite the surprise!" The masked man strode towards the phoenix-eyed man.

At this moment, the masked man's hands twirled like wheels, blocking countless darts, but some still struck him. The Tao Family Brothers' Darts Skill was, after all, second only to Lin Xuankong's, far beyond what a Martial Cultivator could block with bare hands!

In just several breaths, nearly a hundred Flying Sabers had struck the masked man's knees, crotch, throat, and mask. The sound of CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! was incessant as the darts struck. The darts pierced his clothes and riddled his Black Iron Mask with holes; even his eyes were hit by several darts. Yet, the masked man's defense was so strong that even when his eyes were struck, he didn't flinch, his eyelids remaining intact. He was clearly already an expert at the Perfection Stage of the Second Layer!

"Second Layer Perfection!" The phoenix-eyed man's face changed, and he retreated.

The slender man's face also changed drastically. He wanted to retreat, but as he lifted his leg, he discovered that his legs were soundlessly and invisibly entangled by some long, delicate, strange grass! He circulated his Qi Blood and exerted all his strength to pull his legs, trying to break free from the grass. However, to his astonishment, he, a dignified Late Stage Second Layer Martial Cultivator, couldn't break even a single strand of the seemingly fragile strange grass.

Not far away, the Masked Guest had already engaged in close combat with the phoenix-eyed man. The phoenix-eyed man's Darts Skill was exquisite, but his close combat skills were no match for the Black Tiger Claw. After fighting for only seven or eight breaths, his body had already endured hundreds of claws from the Masked Guest. The black clothes he wore were completely torn apart, revealing his body covered with white claw marks. If he hadn't been in the Late Stage of the Second Layer, those hundreds of claws would have already torn him to shreds!

Unfortunately, although the phoenix-eyed man's defense was strong, his Qi Blood was ultimately limited. He wasn't Lin Xuankong, who had a vast amount of Qi Blood to squander at will. Under the Masked Guest's relentless attack, ten breaths later, the phoenix-eyed man had already consumed half his Qi Blood.

Feeling the rapid consumption of his Qi Blood, the fear in his eyes became more and more apparent. He knew that if he continued fighting like this, he would die on the spot within ten more breaths at most!

Seizing an opening, he shouted towards the slender man, "Big Brother, what are you standing around for? Come and help me fight him!"

The slender man's face was full of anger, his voice rising. "I don't want to just stand here either! My legs are entangled by some strange grass; I can't move at all! What the hell is this thing!"

Seeing this, a ruthless glint flashed in the phoenix-eyed man's eyes. He dodged an attack and then turned to run, intending to escape alone.

What he didn't expect was that just as he turned, the Masked Guest suddenly burst out with unprecedented speed, clawing at his buttocks.

With a sickening RIP, the phoenix-eyed man's body stiffened, and he screamed loudly. The Masked Guest then cruelly withdrew his Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw, pulling out a large section of the phoenix-eyed man's intestines from behind.

He waved off the filth and continued to claw at the phoenix-eyed man, who was disoriented by the severe pain. After a breath, the phoenix-eyed man's body stiffened and collapsed to the ground!

"Second Brother!" The slender man's eyes burned with rage.

The Masked Guest then looked at the Manluo Demon Grass entangling the slender man. His face showed a hint of caution as he scanned the ruined temple, but the surroundings were silent except for the sound of the mountain wind rustling through the grass and trees.

A Demon? A Grass Demon? It seems like it can only restrain and has no real offensive power!

The Masked Guest removed his tattered Black Iron Mask. After looking warily at the Manluo Demon Grass for a long moment, he then, ignoring the CLINKING and CLANKING of darts striking him, walked towards Eldest Tao.

A breath later, Eldest Tao, trapped and unable to dodge, slumped to the ground.

After killing Eldest Tao, the Masked Guest cautiously retreated a good distance. Only when he saw the Demon Grass disappear did he finally relax. He warily leaped out of the ruined temple and carefully observed his surroundings for nearly a quarter of an hour. Seeing no movement, he furrowed his brows and walked into the depths of the temple.

A moment later, the Masked Guest emerged from the depths of the temple, holding a large black box, a hint of excitement on his face. If it weren't for that strange Grass Demon, I would have had to expend more effort and use other means!

At this moment, soft footsteps sounded at the entrance of the temple.

The Masked Guest's expression changed, and he quickly turned his head to see an old man with white hair walking in.

Standing at the entrance of the temple, Lin Xuankong looked at the Bearded Guest before him with a slight sense of nostalgia.

This Bearded Martial Cultivator, a dog-eat-dog type even more ferocious than the Tao Family Brothers, was actually the Black Tiger Gang Steward he had encountered outside the herbal shop back then. Over the past month or so, he had always regarded this Black Tiger Gang Bearded Martial Cultivator as his cultivation target. Because when he first saw him, the scene of this Bearded Martial Cultivator being invulnerable had given him, at that time, a great shock! A powerful Martial Cultivator who could kill an Early Stage Second Layer expert in one strike and intimidate dozens of other experts... However, just a month later, seeing this Bearded Martial Cultivator who could easily kill the Tao Family Brothers, he no longer felt any tension!

At this moment, the Bearded Guest's eyes flickered continuously. This old fellow suddenly showed up now... He's a cunning old fox, sitting on the mountain watching the tigers fight! Since he dared to come out after seeing me kill the Tao Family Brothers, he must be pretty strong, or maybe he has some trump card? That Grass Demon just now wasn't very aggressive... But, with my Second Layer Perfection and invincible defense, many methods, and the fierceness of the Black Tiger Technique yet to be used, why should I fear him? I just need to find a way to kill him first!

Thinking of this, his expression changed, and he pointed to the box at his feet. "Friend, since you've come out now, it seems you intend to take a share? I don't know if you're interested in the herbs or the Tao Family Brothers' belongings. How about this, I'll give you a few dozen sets of herbs, and we two..."

While speaking, he suddenly raised his hand, flinging a large cloud of lime powder straight at Lin Xuankong's face. At the same time, he kicked off powerfully with his feet. His entire body emitted a series of tiger-like roars as his bones CRACKED and POPPED, and he charged at Lin Xuankong with a speed far surpassing what he had shown before!

A lion uses its full strength even when hunting a rabbit!

At this moment, the Bearded Martial Cultivator did not hesitate, unleashing the Fierce Tiger Roar Bone Technique from his Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw to instantly boost his combat power, determined to kill Lin Xuankong in a single second!

Chapter 54: Additional Gains, The Dice Fell Off

The Fierce Tiger Roar Bone Technique is one of the most aggressive Heart Methods in the Black Tiger Gang's exquisite Martial Dao, the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw. Although it has the drawback of rapidly consuming the practitioner's Qi Blood, it allows Gang Members who master this Heart Method to unleash explosive power far beyond their own Realm in a short period! This Bearded Martial Cultivator, though at the Second Layer Perfection Realm, under the stimulation of the Bone Roar Technique, already possessed speed fully comparable to an Early Third Layer Martial Cultivator!

"Die, despicable old schemer!"

With a roar, his tiger claws reached near Lin Xuankong's eyes!

However, to his surprise, just as his tiger claws were inches away from the eyes of the retreating old man, something suddenly wrapped around his legs...

The Bearded Martial Cultivator looked down and saw a large number of black vines tightly entangling his legs, quickly spreading towards his abdomen!

"Twin Vine Demon Pearl!"

His face changed, and he frantically swung his claws, trying to sever all the black vines and free his legs!

His strength was far superior to that of Zhang Wu, who was at the Early Second Layer. Combined with the enhancement from the Fierce Tiger Roar Bone Technique, his claw-swinging speed was extremely swift, allowing him to launch countless attacks within just a few breaths!

Numerous black vines were chopped into pieces, falling to the ground and disappearing.

The Bearded Martial Cultivator managed to halt the vines from spreading to his abdomen. However, the Demon driven by the mystical artifact was beyond the complete capability of a Martial Cultivator at Second Layer Perfection to break completely!

No matter how fast he swung his claws or how fierce his attacks, he could only stop the Demon Vines from spreading; he couldn't free his legs!

Amidst his frantic clawing, the Bearded Martial Cultivator looked up at Lin Xuankong with suspicion.
"Are you the Conical Hat Strange Guest?"

The response coming straight at him was the Spiritual Crane Finger covered in white scales!

Lin Xuankong knew very well how difficult it was to kill a Martial Cultivator at Second Layer Perfection. Even though the Bearded Martial Cultivator was trapped and defenseless, ten Late First Layer Martial Cultivators like Ma Rusong could stab him with Longswords for Half a Cup of Tea Time. The result would only be that all ten Longswords would break, and the Bearded Martial Cultivator would at most lose a few hairs!

But with the terrifyingly powerful Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand, if the Bearded Martial Cultivator couldn't dodge, no matter how tough his body was, several hundred hits to his temples and the crown of his head would be unbearable!

The Bearded Martial Cultivator indeed couldn't withstand it. Under the control of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, within four breaths, his temples and crown had been hit 251 times.

Although his skull wasn't shattered, his entire body was driven into the ground, with his head protruding, bleeding from all seven apertures!

However, even at the moment of his death, his legs and body were still tightly wrapped by the Black Demon Vines deep underground!

The power of the Demon Pearl could indeed make a Martial Cultivator invincible at the Same Tier, even capable of fighting across tiers!

The Bearded Martial Cultivator at Second Layer Perfection had killed the Late Second Layer Tao Family Brothers with little effort. Meanwhile, Lin Xuankong, at Late Second Layer with the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand and a Demon Pearl, killed the Bearded Martial Cultivator at Second Layer Perfection effortlessly—it was simply a walk in the park!

With a sigh of emotion, Lin Xuankong looked at his former target, now completely dead, and walked towards the two large wooden boxes.

Moments later, the items were counted: 210 Essence Blood Pearls, 200 Forehead Scales, and various other materials. Nothing was missing. Seeing the shining Forehead Scales, Lin Xuankong could practically envision a complete set of Exorcism Armor beckoning to him—an armor many times more formidable than the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand.

Additionally, he had gained an extra 200 portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup ingredients!

The Bearded Martial Cultivator had gone to great lengths to paralyze the Tao Family Brothers, using Enchanting Fragrance silently, but all those efforts ultimately benefited Lin Xuankong, who had been waiting to reap the rewards!

The Qi Replenishing Soup ingredients were in high demand in the Great Marsh Prefecture, causing countless bloody conflicts. It was said that if any were sold on the black market, Martial Cultivators lacking strength who purchased them would be hunted down.

The Yin Talisman Sect's Formal Disciples received only one portion every two to three days. Even the Chief Steward could only get two portions a day, meaning it would take a full hundred days to receive 200 portions!

Looking at the box full of ingredients, Lin Xuankong was deeply moved. As expected of the target I once pursued, he thought. What a guy! Even in death, he gives me such a great surprise!

「The next morning, at the Cow and Horse Street residence.」

Lin Xuankong sat on the Steward's chair, quietly waiting.

I've already figured out my story, Lin Xuankong thought, how to explain to my superior, Ma Jiang, how I captured the Flying Thieves... Most importantly, I absolutely cannot reveal my Manluo Demon Pearl!

An innocent man gets into trouble for carrying a treasure... especially something like a Demon Pearl. Even the strongest Martial Cultivators can't resist its temptation!

Moments later, a figure arrived like the wind; it was Ma Jiang, looking slightly exhausted.

"I've been so busy these past few days, I haven't had time to play Pai Gow or dice. What's so urgent that you'd have Yang Shan come to my house this early in the morning, not even letting a man sleep properly!"

Lin Xuankong stood up to greet him. "Boss, it really is important. Look here!"

He pointed to the heads of the Tao Family Brothers and the wooden box.

Ma Jiang's eyebrows rose slightly. "What's this?"

Lin Xuankong opened the wooden box. "The heads of the Flying Thieves! And inside this box are the stolen goods—Essence Blood Pearls and Forehead Scales, every last one!"

Ma Jiang's face changed as he carefully looked inside the box.

Moments later, after counting the items, he stood stunned. The White Jade Dice he always cherished and fiddled with in his hand fell to the ground, making a crisp DING DING DING sound.

The three dice rolled on the bluestone floor. When they settled, all three showed sixes facing up...

"These are really the heads of the Flying Thieves?"

"And this box truly contains 200 Forehead Scales and Essence Blood Pearls!!"

...Half a Cup of Tea Time later, after hearing Lin Xuankong's explanation, Ma Jiang looked at him with some doubt. "You identified the two Flying Thieves through the origin of the Darts, then tracked them down?"

Lin Xuankong frowned slightly. "Indeed!"

Ma Jiang was silent for a moment, then suddenly sighed. "Thousands couldn't find them, but you managed to so quickly... I know you must be hiding something from me."

"But rest assured, I understand your concerns. Which Martial Cultivator doesn't have their own trump cards?"

"For instance, if not for the recent battles with the Demon People Race, no one in the sect would know I possess the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand!"

"I understand this, and my good friends Chief Steward Gao, the Chief Steward, and the Hall Master—they all understand this too. They had plenty of trump cards hidden back in their day!"

Lin Xuankong's eyes flickered as he looked up at Ma Jiang.

Ma Jiang suddenly smiled again. "I've realized one thing: betting on you was definitely the right decision!"

"Alright, it's time to report to the Council Hall! HA HA HA, I can't wait to see the expressions on Chief Steward Jiang and those other guys' faces when they hear about this!"

With that, he hurried outside.

Lin Xuankong said, "Boss, you dropped your dice!"

Not long after, the two arrived at the Council Hall in Mule and Horse Street.

As usual, the numerous esteemed Stewards of the Yin Talisman Sect, in their neat Daoist Robes, had all arrived. Their faces showed fatigue, but their eyes burned with fervor.

During the search these past two days, everyone had clearly been secretly competing. Even though they knew the chances of vying with Zhao Yufei for the Silver Jade position were slim, who wouldn't covet that incredibly glorious and highly beneficial role!

Chapter 55: Every Steward in the Hall Stares Wide-eyed

In the council hall, everyone sat in order. Lin Xuankong naturally still occupied the last position, near the door where it was breezy.

At the head position, Jiang Yuran was dressed in an immaculately clean Moon White Daoist Robe, sitting upright behind the brightly polished runic sandalwood table, with several Grand Chief Stewards seated on either side.

She swept her gaze around and said, "Although the task of tracking down the Flying Thieves is difficult, the lives of dozens of disciples cannot be lost in vain. Those two Flying Thieves must be caught! Everyone, report yesterday's progress!"

Ma Jiang, full of joy, was about to stand up, but Steward Xu Bei stood up first. Clad in a blue steward's Daoist robe, Xu Bei stood before everyone, scanning them with a slightly proud expression.

He cupped his hands towards Jiang Yuran and said, "Reporting to Chief Steward, yesterday Steward Zhao, Steward Huang, and I thoroughly searched the Spirit Snake Gang's territory in the city. Next will be the territories of the Huang Family, the Guo Family, the Feng Family, and the Black Tiger Gang!"

He confidently said, "As long as the Flying Thieves haven't left the city, they absolutely cannot evade the formidable tracking ability of the Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs! Within seven days, we will search the entire city and find concrete clues!"

Jiang Yuran nodded slightly. "The Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs' tracking ability is unparalleled. As long as you, Steward Xua, and your team search diligently and find clues soon, your and Ma Rusong's punishment can naturally be waived!"

Upon hearing this, Xu Bei and Ma Rusong's faces immediately lit up with joy.

Steward Zhao Yufei, sitting beside them, slightly raised her chin. Filled with confidence due to the Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs' power... She knew that she was only one step away from becoming the Silver Jade Steward!

She was holding a few blood-red beads in her hand, which were the Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls she had prepared to feed the three Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs today. Thinking of the three Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs that had recently made her stand out, she pressed her red lips into a smile. She would certainly have the servants take good care of them today...

The other stewards and officials secretly shook their heads. They didn't have Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs, making it too difficult to compete with Zhao Yufei. Zhao Yufei, along with Xu Bei and Huang Yinrong, was using the Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs. Meanwhile, they could only urge their disciples; the efficiency gap was tens of times greater! But even so, it was still the Silver Jade position. How could they give up so easily...?

"Chief Steward Jiang, I have an important report!" Ma Jiang stood up straight, glancing at the smug Xu Bei and the haughty Zhao Yufei.

Jiang Yuran picked up the tea on the table and nodded, "Steward Ma, please speak."

Ma Jiang suppressed his joy and tried to stay calm. "Steward Lin under my command has already completed the task!"

Jiang Yuran's expression shifted slightly. Forgetting her tea, she asked in surprise, "Found clues already?"

Xu Bei, still standing, looked at Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong, "Already found clues? How is that possible!"

According to Jiang Yuran, the task was actually divided into two steps: first, gather concrete clues, and second, capture the Flying Thieves. Evidently, Xu Bei and Jiang Yuran had misunderstood Ma Jiang's words.

The other stewards were also somewhat astonished. The red-faced steward, Steward Hu, couldn't help but speak, "The Great Marsh Prefecture City is so vast, and you found clues so quickly! Steward Ma, from what angle did Steward Lin start investigating?"

Ma Jiang laughed. "Naturally, he started by investigating the origin of the Darts. But Steward Hu, your statement has a slight error. Steward Lin hasn't just found clues; he has already found the Flying Thieves!"

"Found the Flying Thieves?" The red-faced Steward Hu almost thought he had misheard.

The other stewards and officials couldn't help but turn to look at Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong. If they weren't in the council hall, with Chief Steward Jiang and the Grand Chief Stewards present, they would almost think Ma Jiang was joking. The Great Marsh Prefecture City was so vast; hiding one or two people would be like finding a needle in a haystack. How could it be so quick?

It wasn't just them; the four Yin Talisman Sect Grand Chief Stewards present, whether it was Wu Liangye with his Wine Gourd or the dashing Gao Yunchao, all showed a trace of astonishment on their faces.

Xu Bei frowned and repeated, "Already found the Flying Thieves?"

He and Huang Yinrong had used Steward Zhao Yufei's Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs! Those were worth ten thousand silver, their tracking ability equivalent to thousands of men! Yet, he himself hadn't found any clues... What made him particularly unwilling was that the one claiming to have found clues and the Flying Thieves was Ma Jiang, that infuriatingly straightforward fool!

At this moment, Ma Jiang looked joyfully at Lin Xuankong. He was revealing the truth bit by bit, naturally, to leave a deep impression on everyone present—a deep impression of his most capable subordinate, Lin Xuankong!

Then he spoke, "Apologies, a slip of the tongue. Actually, Steward Lin hasn't just found clues or found the Flying Thieves; he has already killed the two Flying Thieves and brought back all the stolen goods!"

"What?"

"Impossible!"

"How could it be so quick!"

"Killed the Flying Thieves? But those were two Flying Thieves skilled with Darts!"

Many stewards and officials, who had been reclining in their chairs, immediately stood up, all looking at Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong in unison.

Jiang Yuran and the four Grand Chief Stewards also stood up.

Jiang Yuran, the Charming Chief Steward, had a face full of confusion. As she rose, she knocked over the teacup on the table, wetting her pristine Moon White Daoist Robe, but she didn't even notice.

"Really?" Jiang Yuran asked.

"Absolutely!" Ma Jiang cupped his hands and said.

Xu Bei's face changed colors, his eyes filled with unwillingness. He was still planning to wash away his disgrace by finding clues. "Steward Ma, are you joking? This is the council hall, not some gambling den where you play Pai Gow and dice!"

Ma Jiang sneered coldly, ignoring him.

Among the crowd, Steward Ma Rusong's expression was incomparably complex. Ma Jiang said that old bastard Lin Xuankong killed the Flying Thieves and retrieved the stolen goods! Ma Rusong even hoped that everything happening before him was just a dream!

Damn it, could that old bastard Lin Xuankong have gone to great lengths to buy some materials—the Marsh Python Forehead Scale and Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearl—to pass them off as the stolen goods? But that old bastard is a pauper! He lives in a dilapidated old wooden building. Where would he get so much silver to buy those materials!

While Ma Rusong was dazed, Jiang Yuran, who had been standing behind the sandalwood table, walked around it. A hint of joy appeared on her charming face as she asked repeatedly, "The Flying Thieves' bodies? The stolen goods? Have you brought them?"

The theft at the Third Warehouse was the most disgusting and annoying affair she had encountered since her father commanded her to assist the reclusive Hall Master Xu Zhenhuan in managing Great Marsh Hall. Now, this frustration was finally about to be vented. How could she not be pleased!

However, until she saw the stolen goods and the Flying Thieves' bodies with her own eyes, she couldn't be completely sure. Doubt still filled her heart. After all, how could Lin Xuankong, without the help of the Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs, find the Flying Thieves so quickly in the vast Great Marsh Prefecture City?

Ma Jiang nodded to Lin Xuankong. Lin Xuankong turned and called towards the entrance of the council hall, "Li Er, Yang Mountain, bring the items up!"

When Yang Mountain and Li Er brought up the Tao Family Brothers' heads and the wooden boxes, everyone turned to look. Jiang Yuran then spoke:

"Steward Xua, you are responsible for warehouse matters. Steward Ma Rusong, you are the steward of the Third Warehouse. You two, check if these are the goods that were originally stolen!"

"Grand Chief Steward Gao Yunchao, you are responsible for gathering intelligence on the Independent Martial Cultivators in the Prefecture City. Examine these two Flying Thieves' heads!"

Hearing this, the three stood up and walked towards the heads and the wooden boxes. However, their expressions were strikingly different. Gao Yunchao had a hint of joy on his face and nodded to Ma Jiang. In contrast, Xu Bei and Ma Rusong's faces alternated between pale and flushed, their eyes flickering.

Chapter 56: The Grand Steward with the Jade Belt Silver Token, Anticipating the Nine Thunders Surrounding Body

Moments later, Gao Yunchao, a man in his thirties with a small mole between his eyebrows and exuding a certain grace, spoke:

"Replying to the Chief Steward, these two should be the Tao Brothers. Several years ago, they offended Hall Master Zheng by stealing the Darts Manual from the Zheng Martial Arts Hall. However, they have been hiding their identities in recent years, so their exact cultivation and daily activities are unknown!"

Jiang Yuran's eyes flickered. "Stealing the Darts Manual several years ago? That does match the two Flying Thieves skilled with Flying Sabers! Steward Xua, Steward Ma, what about your side?"

Upon hearing Jiang Yuran's question, Xu Bei and Ma Rusong exchanged a glance, their eyes full of unwillingness.

According to their previous plan, they intended to rely on Zhao Yufei's Dragon Blood Treasure Dog to find clues about the Flying Thieves and thus avoid the punishment hanging over their heads. That punishment entailed much more than the loss of a month's salary; it was also a matter of their reputation...

Yet, just now, when the two were checking the materials, they shockingly discovered that the items in the wooden box were indeed completely identical to the stolen goods. Chief Steward Jiang had reported the quantities of two hundred ten Essence Blood Pearls and two hundred Forehead Scales. Although the other items weren't reported in quantity, they matched the list completely. This indicated that these were indeed stolen goods, and Lin Xuankong wasn't faking it!

At this moment, Ma Rusong was naturally the most frustrated. He was utterly fed up with Lin Xuankong, who had repeatedly caused him humiliation. Now, however, he had to personally verify the goods and grudgingly acknowledge that Lin Xuankong had accomplished a feat that dozens of Stewards of various ranks and thousands of disciples had never achieved!

His hands clenched tightly within his robe sleeves. He almost wished he could turn and leave on the spot. But alas, how could he dare not answer Chief Steward Jiang's question!

Xu Bei remained silent. Ma Rusong, however, had no choice but to offer a respectful bow and, with great difficulty, reluctantly said, "The items in the box indeed match the stolen items."

Jiang Yuran's eyes brightened, and a smile instantly appeared on her face. She no longer had any doubts. Turning to Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong, she repeatedly exclaimed, "Good, good, good!"

"Since the moment the warehouse was robbed, countless Martial Cultivators have been ridiculing our Yin Talisman Sect's incompetence!" she declared. "Now, Steward Lin has managed to kill the Flying Thieves and recover the stolen goods within two days. This has greatly vented my anger and let those petty people know the consequences of offending our Yin Talisman Sect!"

She turned back to the sandalwood table and shouted, "Ma Jiang, receive your orders!"

"Present!" Ma Jiang cupped his hands.

"Immediately spread the news that our Yin Talisman Sect captured the Flying Thieves within two days!"

"Yes!" Ma Jiang's face lit with joy as he turned to leave.

"Gao Yunchao, receive your orders!"

"Present!" Gao Yunchao cupped his hands.

"Go to the Thousand Treasures Pavilion to fetch the Silver Token and Jade Belt. I will personally award them to Silver Jade Steward Lin Xuankong for his great accomplishment!" Jiang Yuran said decisively.

"Yes!" Gao Yunchao turned and left.

After issuing the two orders, Jiang Yuran fixed her gaze on Lin Xuankong. Moments later, she suddenly smiled. "When you return to your station, Steward Lin, you must write down in detail how you captured the Flying Thieves. I want to read it carefully!"

Lin Xuankong cupped his hands. "As you command!"

"Sit and wait for a while until Chief Steward Gao returns!" Jiang Yuran smiled.

Lin Xuankong turned to walk toward the last seat, but Jiang Yuran's laughter rang out behind him. "As Silver Jade Steward, you should naturally sit in the foremost seat among all the Stewards, not the last one!"

Lin Xuankong paused, looking at the Steward originally seated in the first position. That Steward rose with a smiling face. "Silver Jade Steward, please don't eye my seat! A Silver Jade Steward who has achieved such a remarkable feat for our Yin Talisman Sect should sit beside the eight Stewards, not here. If you sit here, I'll have to stand!"

All the surrounding Stewards burst into laughter.

They all smiled as they watched Lin Xuankong take the seat next to Steward Hu. At this moment, their hearts were filled not only with envy but also with astonishment. They had speculated before about who would receive this Silver Jade position. Most guessed it would be Zhao Yufei, aided by her Dragon Blood Treasure Dog. Others fantasized that they might get lucky, while some believed the Flying Thieves would evade capture altogether. Yet, no one had expected that the white-haired Lin Xuankong would get the position! Moments later, Gao Yunchao returned with the Silver Token and Jade Belt.

Jiang Yuran took the Silver Token and Jade Belt and walked up to Lin Xuankong. This Charming Chief Steward, whose status was second only to the Sect Leader and equal to the Hall Masters, personally helped Lin Xuankong put on the Jade Belt and hang the Silver Token!

This Charming Chief Steward had always been aloof and had never done such a thing for anyone else—not even her extremely doting father, the Yin Talisman Sect Leader, had ever enjoyed such treatment!

Lin Xuankong, on the other hand, felt Jiang Yuran personally helping him with the Token and Belt. He suddenly thought of the Young Lady and felt somewhat embarrassed.

Standing by the wooden box, Yang Mountain and Li Er saw this and couldn't help but embrace each other excitedly.

Seeing Lin Xuankong enjoying such prestigious honor and treatment, the numerous Stewards sighed repeatedly, feeling that the affairs of this world were truly mystifying.

While marveling, some glanced toward Zhao Yufei's position, only to find that the Steward, who had been so composed just a short while ago—the time it takes to drink a few cups of tea—had left the council hall without anyone noticing!

Jiang Yuran had noticed Zhao Yufei's departure long ago. After smiling at Lin Xuankong, she turned back to the sandalwood table, thinking to herself: That talented and proud young lady of the Zhao Family must be feeling extremely disappointed right now! Hmph, this also counts as a refinement of her Heart Nature! If she can't even bear such a small setback, how could she hope to truly achieve anything in the Martial Dao in the future!

The Martial Dao is difficult, as hard as ascending to heaven... My old father chants that every day! Hmm, speaking of my father, I should send news about catching the Flying Thief today. It was actually an old man I appointed as a Steward who accomplished this great feat. I wonder if Father will be surprised when he hears about this; that scene will definitely be interesting!

「Zhao Family Mansion.」

Zhao Yufei looked at the three Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs lying beside her, wagging their tails. She tightened her grip on the iron whip in her left hand, while her right hand, holding several Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls, suddenly exerted force.

CRACK, CRACK, CRACK.

Six Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls, worth hundreds of taels, shattered into a cloud of blood mist. The three Dragon Blood Treasure Dogs immediately stood up and retreated uneasily. As treasure dogs with keen spirituality, they could clearly feel their master's anger at this moment.

Moreover, their master was raising the whip...

Zhao Yufei looked at the three dejected treasure dogs that had retreated to the wall, their eyes evading hers. She sensed the grievance they were transmitting to her Heart Spirit. Her left hand, which had raised the whip, now hung weakly at her side.

Her resolute, cold, and beautiful face showed deep helplessness.

How did I lose! How could I lose? And to that white-haired Lin Xuankong, whom I never even considered a rival!

Even if Lin Xuankong once had good achievements with Ma Jiang's Exorcism Hand, so what? Compared to me—in family background, age, strength, status—how could he compare in any aspect? Even his Four-Seal Talent... at his age, what use was it? A Five-Seal, Six-Seal, or even Seven-Seal Talent wouldn't matter at that age!

In a flash, a trace of hatred appeared in her cold eyes. Lin Xuankong, do you think taking away my Silver Jade position is worth celebrating? The more glorious you are today, the more miserable you'll be in the future! I, Zhao Yufei, swear I will make you clearly see how wide the gap between us will become!

「The appointment of the Silver Jade Steward was, of course, a major event for the Great Marsh Hall.」

After all, it was the most prestigious Steward position, second only to a Grand Chief Steward. Furthermore, even a Grand Chief Steward's salary only matched that of the Silver Jade Steward. And if Lin Xuankong had the opportunity to become a Steward in the future, he would be a Silver Jade Steward, with a salary comparable to that of a Grand Chief Steward!

The bestowing of such an honorary title naturally warranted a grand celebration banquet with hundreds of attendees!

Repeatedly toasted by numerous disciples, Deputy Stewards, and Stewards, Lin Xuankong transformed from someone only vaguely known within the Yin Talisman Sect to a figure known by all!

「After the banquet ended.」

A slightly tipsy Lin Xuankong returned home carrying a wooden box full of 'recovered goods.' He enjoyed an elaborate meal with the joyful Young Lady. Then, the Young Lady accompanied him to carefully tally the "recovered goods." Afterward, she tapped her chin with her finger.

"We're only two hundred Forehead Scales short of the Eight Hundred Forehead Scales. This is certainly worth celebrating and having a feast for!" she said. "But once we gather all the materials and ask the Artifact Refiner from the Great Marsh Prefecture to craft it, it will definitely cost a lot of money, so we mustn't splurge for now!"

"As for the other supplies, they're manageable. The Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls, however, are said to be even more valuable than Forehead Scales; they're crucial for cultivating spiritual creatures! I need to find some time to visit the Huang Family and seek advice from their young lady. They once cultivated a Thousand Thunder Willow, so they should have experience!"

Looking at her 'little housekeeper' demeanor, Lin Xuankong couldn't help but laugh and said:

"Besides that, you can drink the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup freely now. We have over three hundred portions on hand, and from now on, we can receive six portions every day!"

Lii Xiaolan shot him a look. "As if I'm a glutton, drinking it freely! Forget it; leave all these trivial matters to me. You should rest well today and diligently cultivate Yin Talisman Thunder tomorrow! You can finally cultivate this refined Martial Dao. Are you happy, Lord Lin, our Steward of the Jade Belt and Silver Token!"

"You're still missing the title of 'husband'!" Lin Xuankong said earnestly.

Lii Xiaolan bit her lip slightly. "Dream on! Go to sleep now!" With that, she darted off!

Anticipation rose in Lin Xuankong's eyes. The medicinal supply from the Silver Jade position is in hand, the Eight Hundred Forehead Scales are nearly gathered, and tomorrow, I can finally learn Yin Talisman Thunder!

Thinking of Gu Beicheng's longsword wreathed in lightning, the several pinky-sized lightning bolts Han Lu had summoned, and recalling the Thunder God in his vision who straddled heaven and earth... Lin Xuankong couldn't help but be filled with longing.

This Thunder Martial Dao of the Yin Talisman Sect, passed down for over a millennium, is as profound as an Immortal Technique! However, compared to the Martial Dao of other sects, it's much more esoteric and demands high Talent, likely making it challenging to cultivate! I wonder how long it will take me to reach the Entry Level and summon the first bolt of lightning, with the [Vigorous in Old Age] Life Plate aiding me and my high compatibility with Yin Talisman Thunder. They say that the Four-Seal Genius, Gu Beicheng, spent two and a half years cultivating nine bolts of lightning to surround his body, already achieving Initial Glimpse. How long will it take for me to achieve Nine Thunders Surrounding Body? A year? Half a year? Three months? Two months? Or even shorter? Hopefully, it will be shorter, much faster!

Chapter 57: Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect, Visualizing Yin Talisman Divine Thunder

Within the inner city of Great Marsh Prefecture, in a courtyard spanning hundreds of acres, resplendent with flower pavilions and towers, an elegant, beautiful woman with white hair, appearing to be around thirty years old, sat in a pavilion admiring the flowers and scenery.

A woman in a plain white robe hurried to the outside of the pavilion, knelt, kowtowed, and then spoke, "Elder Hua, Ma Rusong says he has an important matter to discuss with you!"

The white-haired woman's eyes flickered, a divine light flashing within them. "Let him come over!"

A moment later, Ma Rusong followed the white-robed female disciple to the outside of the pavilion. He knelt from a distance and then approached the pavilion entrance on his knees. "Elder Hua, Xiaosong is here to see you!"

"Hmm, if you need my help with something, just say it!" Elder Hua said softly, her gaze fixed on a bamboo grove outside the pavilion.

Ma Rusong's eyes flickered, and he said, "Xiaosong wishes to ask the Elder to dispatch a disciple to deal with a man named Lin Xuankong!"

"What is his cultivation level, and which sect does he belong to?" Elder Hua frowned slightly. For him to require one of my disciples to act, he must possess some skill, perhaps an expert of the Fourth Layer or higher!

Ma Rusong replied, "His name is Lin Xuankong. He is my... my fellow disciple, at the Second Layer of Transcendence!"

Elder Hua looked at Ma Rusong. "Your fellow disciple, someone from the Yin Talisman Sect?"

Ma Rusong nodded in affirmation.

Elder Hua looked at Ma Rusong, slightly surprised. "Merely a Second Layer?"

She secretly shook her head. The Elixir Ma Rusong had given her was Extremely Divine and Mysterious, restoring her youthful appearance. She naturally remembered this favor... However, Ma Rusong was using her favor, the favor of an Elder of the Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect, to deal with a Second Layer ant? How unwise! She had previously had her disciples investigate his background. Ma Rusong usually acted with caution. Was he momentarily agitated and had lost his senses?

Seeing Elder Hua frown, the beautiful female disciple beside her immediately spoke, "Your Yin Talisman Sect Leader has a good relationship with our Elder. His disciples are considered our Elder's juniors. Ma Rusong, a request like yours puts Elder Hua in a difficult position!"

Of course, what vexed this female disciple the most was that Ma Rusong was using the favor of an Elder of the Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect to deal with a mere Second Layer ant. This was simply laughable! Her Elder could even defeat a Fifth Layer expert...

Upon hearing this, Ma Rusong's expression changed slightly, and he could not help but look up at Elder Hua.

Elder Hua pondered for a moment, then said, "I will always remember the favor you've done me. However, the target is a Yin Talisman Sect disciple, and a mere Second Layer at that... If word of this were to spread, people would say that I, Hua Yanluo, am bullying the weak!"

Here's what we'll do: in two months, the Great Marsh Demon Suppression Valley, which is under my jurisdiction, will open. I will have my disciples invite Second and Third Layer disciples from all the cities, families, and sects within Great Marsh Prefecture to participate. At that time, I will have my disciples invite Lin Xuankong to join the Demon Slaying Conference. No one from the Yin Talisman Sect should dare to slight my disciples by refusing!"

The Demon Slaying Conference! Ma Rusong's eyes lit up.

That Great Marsh Demon Suppression Valley, filled with treacherous swamps and teeming with demons, was a place where the nightmares and dreams of disciples from every sect intertwined. In previous Demon Slaying Conferences, although some had gained instant fame, embarked on the path to ascension, and reaped immense rewards, it was a place of nine deaths and one life. Out of a thousand elite Martial Cultivators who participated, it was difficult for even thirty to emerge alive. Lin Xuankong's combat achievements relied solely on the Exorcism Hand Ma Jiang gave him. Consequently, he definitely couldn't contend with experts at the Late Stage of the Second Layer or those who had reached Second Layer Perfection. He would fare even worse against Martial Cultivators at the Middle and Late Stages of the Third Layer! Most importantly, the valley harbored countless terrifying suppressed Tier Two and Tier Three demons. Even Martial Cultivators at the Mid-grade Third Layer would likely find it impossible to advance a single step within it! Lin Xuankong, you insignificant Second Layer cultivator, go ahead and revel in your current success! In two months, it will be the day you die!

"Xiaosong kowtows in gratitude to Elder Hua!" Ma Rusong, having thought this through, his eyes shining brightly, knelt and kowtowed repeatedly.

At the Mule Street Branch of the Yin Talisman Sect, Lin Xuankong stood outside the Cultivation Room, looking at Steward Xu Bei, who was instructing the disciples.

Although Steward Xu Bei's strength was at the Mid-grade Third Layer, a significant step below Ma Jiang and Zhao Yufei, he was highly valued due to his Three-Seal Talent. One of Xu Bei's duties was to teach disciples the Yin Talisman Technique.

What slightly irritated Lin Xuankong was that he had arrived early at the Cultivation Room today. However, Xu Bei claimed he had just begun his own cultivation and was not in sync with the progress of the current group of disciples. Xu Bei asked Lin Xuankong to wait until he finished the important task of instructing these disciples before he would impart the cultivation technique. This wait had already lasted for more than an hour!

Once the instruction was over, the numerous Yin Talisman Sect disciples who had finished their cultivation walked out. When the disciples saw Lin Xuankong, identifiable by his Jade Belt and Silver Token, standing at the entrance, their expressions turned solemn, and they bowed respectfully.

Chief Silver Jade Steward. In the entire Yin Talisman Sect, there was only one. At this moment, everyone in the Yin Talisman Sect knew of him!

After the last disciple left the Cultivation Room, Xu Bei finally walked to the entrance. He then looked at Lin Xuankong, an apologetic expression on his face. "Ah, Steward Lin, why are you still standing here? I thought you had left long ago! I was even planning to find you specifically in a little while to impart the Yin Talisman Technique to you!"

"No need to trouble Steward Xua. I can learn the cultivation technique from the Transmission Jade Butterfly myself, and I will also practice by contemplating the Visualization Jade on my own!"

Lin Xuankong glanced at Xu Bei's hypocritical expression and walked straight towards the Transmission Jade Butterfly and the Rune Stone in the Cultivation Room.

He hadn't stood here for an hour for nothing; he had already been carefully observing the methods the disciples used during their cultivation! Besides, with Xu Bei's superficial apology and the underlying hostility in his eyes, how could Lin Xuankong possibly allow this man to guide his cultivation technique?

Chapter 58: Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect, Visualizing Yin Talisman Divine Thunder_2

Xu Bei saw this and said expressionlessly,

"Steward Lin, do you think the Yin Talisman Technique is that simple?

Even a genius like Gu Beicheng would take several years to reach the Entry Level in this Yin Talisman Technique without guidance! Back then, it took him two and a half years to cultivate the Nine Thunders Surrounding Body, and that was only with my daily guidance!

At your advanced age, Steward Lin, it will be even harder without guidance. It might take eight or nine years, or maybe even a dozen! Are you sure you don't want me to give you detailed guidance?"

Lin Xuankong had already walked to the stone platform holding the Transmission Jade Butterfly. He ignored Xu Bei, picked up the Transmission Jade Butterfly, and began to examine it.

Seeing Lin Xuankong coldly dismiss him, Xu Bei's face instantly turned incredibly grim. He thought of how Lin Xuankong had prevented his own punishment from being lifted, and of Lin Xuankong's glory the previous day versus his own loss of face. Now, seeing Lin Xuankong's current demeanor, the usually proud Xu Bei couldn't help but feel a surge of resentment.

He sneered coldly and said, "Hmph! Without guidance, just blindly practicing on your own, I'd like to see how many years it will take you to cultivate Thunder Surrounding Body! Of course, Steward Lin, at your age, this life of yours will pass quickly. You might not even have enough time left to cultivate Thunder Surrounding Body!"

After saying that, he left with a sneer, shaking his sleeve in contempt.

The more than two hundred new disciples outside the Cultivation Room witnessed this scene. They immediately looked at each other, none daring to speak.

One was a Chief Silver Jade Steward, the other a dignified Three-Seal Steward. This was truly like Immortals fighting; who would dare intervene!

A moment later, the disciples left the Cultivation Room and gathered in the sect hall's dining area, discussing the events as they ate.

They were all new disciples with One-Seal or Two-Seal Talent, not yet having entered the Transcendence Realm. Their Cultivation over the past few years had been a source of constant frustration. They keenly felt the profound difficulty of cultivating the Yin Talisman Technique.

A disciple with extremely thick, dark eyebrows said, "Without guidance, how could one possibly cultivate Yin Talisman Thunder! Steward Lin may be strong, but not showing deference to Steward Xu, the Transmission Steward, was truly impulsive!"

One of the disciples looked at the thick-browed disciple. "Senior Brother Lou Yi, among our more than two hundred One-Seal and Two-Seal disciples, you have the fastest Cultivation Speed. I remember you took just seven months to cultivate your first Divine Thunder Root! I wonder how long it will take Steward Lin to cultivate even one Divine Thunder Root?"

The thick-browed Lou Yi shook his head. "I heard Steward Lin has Four-Seal Talent. According to the Cultivation Technique, with such Talent, he should have a chance to cultivate eight or nine Divine Thunder Roots!

But at his advanced age and without Steward Xu's guidance, relying solely on the Transmission Jade Butterfly and his own visualization, it's a question whether he can cultivate even the first Divine Thunder Root!"

Upon hearing this, the disciples all frowned deeply, feeling that this Chief Silver Jade Steward was indeed too impulsive to oppose the Transmission Steward!

After discussing for a while, sudden footsteps echoed nearby, and the disciples turned to see Gu Beicheng with three strands of long beard walking over.

All the disciples immediately put down their chopsticks, stood up with admiration on their faces, and saluted with cupped hands. Gu Beicheng frowned and nodded slightly.

He had heard the disciples' discussion from afar. Although he was under Steward Xu's jurisdiction, Xu Bei's fawning towards superiors and arrogance towards inferiors... even though Steward Xu had the merit of teaching Gu Beicheng the technique, Gu Beicheng still found his conduct somewhat displeasing.

Upon hearing about Lin Xuankong's situation, he naturally felt some dissatisfaction. As he walked quickly, he thought to himself, Although my understanding of the Yin Talisman Technique is far inferior to Steward Xu's, I should be able to give Senior Brother Lin some guidance. That would be better than him blindly visualizing the jade and risking a cultivation error. Moreover, Chief Steward Jiang asked me today to inform Steward Lin and the others that the Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect's Great Marsh Demon Suppression Valley will open for the Demon Slaying Conference in two months. And this time, Steward Lin is listed among the Yin Talisman Sect's participants... I should inform him as soon as possible. Slaying demons is an incredibly perilous task, almost a death sentence! Why on earth was Steward Lin, who just became a Silver Jade Steward, chosen for this?!

After Gu Beicheng walked away, the disciples began to whisper again.

Lou Yi gazed with admiration at Gu Beicheng's departing back and said, "I heard that when Steward Gu cultivated his first Divine Thunder Root under Steward Xu's guidance, it took him only two or three months. Such Talent is truly beyond envy, completely out of reach!"

Someone, their face full of envy, said softly, "Steward Gu's Cultivation Speed is extremely fast. I heard even Steward Xu is far behind him!"

All the disciples wore envious expressions.

Most of them, despite being in the prime of their lives, had taken more than ten months to cultivate their first Divine Thunder Root. They couldn't compare to Lou Yi, were far behind Xu Bei, let alone the once-in-ten-thousand Talent of Steward Gu!

「In the Cultivation Room,」

Lin Xuankong moved the Transmission Jade Butterfly away from his forehead, silently recalling the information that had just been transmitted to his Brain Mansion: "...The heavens unleash killing intent, stars shift and constellations realign; the earth unleashes killing intent, dragons and serpents rise from the land; humanity unleashes killing intent..."

The Yin Talisman Sect's Transmission Jade Butterfly was truly wondrous.

Simply by placing the jade butterfly against one's forehead and channeling one's Qi and Blood into it, a vast amount of profound cultivation technique content would automatically manifest in one's Brain Mansion.

The Yin Talisman Technique comprised tens of thousands of words. If one were to read it from a book, it would take a considerable amount of time; fully memorizing and understanding it all would require several days.

But with this Transmission Jade Butterfly, all that content was instantly imprinted in his memory. Furthermore, the intricacies of the Heart Method, its Heart Method Operating Techniques, and so forth, all became clear to him one by one...

According to the Cultivation Technique,...

Chapter 59: Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect, Visualizing Yin Talisman Divine Thunder_3

In the early stages of cultivation for Yin Talisman Sect members, they need to diligently practice the Yin Talisman Heart Method and visualize Visualization Jade in order to gradually nurture the Divine Thunder Root within their bodies, which can then be stimulated to produce lightning.

Depending on the level of compatibility, the number of Divine Thunder Roots nurtured within the body varies, and naturally, the speed of cultivation and the power of the techniques will also differ!

Generally speaking, a disciple with One-Seal Talent can nurture two Divine Thunder Roots within their body.

A disciple with Two-Seal Talent can nurture four Divine Thunder Roots; among them, those extremely close to Three-Seal Talent can nurture up to five.

And so on: Three Seals can nurture six, Four Seals eight, and Five Seals ten. It is said that the founder who obtained the cultivation technique through a fortunate encounter had Nine-Seal Talent and was able to nurture as many as eighteen Divine Thunder Roots!

The quantity of Divine Thunder Roots is closely related to the amount and power of the lightning a Yin Talisman Sect member can generate in the future.

For example, a disciple with Two-Seal Talent, who can nurture four Divine Thunder Roots within their body, will, upon reaching the Initial Glimpse realm, be able to conjure four bolts of Divine Thunder simultaneously, known as Four Thunders Surrounding Body!

In this way, even if the cultivation of this Two-Seal disciple continuously improves, and the lightning becomes thicker and more powerful, the overall power of the Divine Thunder they can summon will still differ greatly compared to a disciple with Three-Seal Talent at the same realm!

When compared to the Nine-Seal talent of the founder, the difference is even more stark, like night and day!

Even at the same realm as the founder, when you circulate your Divine Technique, four bolts of Divine Thunder might surround your body, while they circulate their technique once and have eighteen bolts...

After understanding the cultivation technique, Lin Xuankong thought to himself: The impact of compatibility on the Yin Talisman Technique is this significant? No wonder the Yin Talisman Sect, unlike the Black Tiger Gang, requires a talent test for discipleship. A One-Seal Talent is indeed the minimum requirement... Martial Cultivators without compatibility would be unable to nurture Divine Thunder Roots within their bodies even if they joined the Yin Talisman Sect, thus making it impossible to cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique! When I myself was tested, the result was Four-Seal compatibility, the same as Gu Beicheng. According to the cultivation technique, Four-Seal Talent can generally nurture eight Divine Thunder Roots within the body, at most nine! This means that when I reach the Initial Glimpse realm and can evoke lightning, I have the chance to achieve Nine Thunders Surrounding Body. That would be extraordinarily exceptional, a talent found in one among tens of thousands... a true genius... At the very least, far superior to Han Lu with his mere Five Thunders Surrounding Body, and significantly better than Xu Bei's Six Thunders Surrounding Body! However, when I was tested, I had a feeling that if I mobilized my Qi Blood, I could light up even more seals... I wonder if that feeling was real! If it is, perhaps I could nurture ten or even more Divine Thunder Roots! Unfortunately, the illusion within the Heaven-Interpreting Stone is too dangerous. With my current strength, I can't guarantee my safety, so I can't try it again... However, I'll be starting cultivation soon, and I'll find out then how many Divine Thunder Roots I can ultimately nurture!

Thinking of this, Lin Xuankong set down the Transmission Jade Butterfly and looked to the left side of the cultivation room, where four man-sized special jade stones stood.

These four Visualization Jade Stones were made of some unknown special jade material and glimmered brightly with mysterious allure. Each stone bore tens of thousands of marks, seemingly left by strikes from the Yin Talisman Thunder Skill.

However, these marks were chaotic, appearing completely random, much like a child's scribbles...

According to the cultivation technique, to nurture Divine Thunder Roots, one must visualize the first Visualization Jade Stone during cultivation... But with the marks on this stone being so chaotic, what exactly should one visualize? Normally, shouldn't one visualize a Divine Thunder Diagram, Lotus Diagram, Old Tree Diagram, or an Immortal Fairy and Immortal Man Painting? What the hell, these chaotic marks... they seem even more random than a monkey's scribbles!

Lin Xuankong silently circulated the Yin Talisman Technique Heart Method while observing the Visualization Jade Stone for a long time. After nearly a cup of tea's worth of time, he still had gained nothing. This made him increasingly agitated, and he finally thought to himself: It seems I must seek guidance from Brother Ma Jiang and ask him how exactly to visualize this Visualization Jade Stone! The Yin Talisman Technique, with its profound mysteries, really isn't as simple as the Pine Crane Longevity Technique!

As this thought arose, he stopped visualizing and focused on the Life Plate within his Brain Mansion.

Lin Xuankong: Remaining Lifespan, twenty-five years and fifty-three days

Life Plate: [Vigorous in Old Age]

First Talent of Life Plate: [Old and Wise] Age 59, cultivation speed increased fiftyfold

Realm: Transcendence Second Layer Late Stage

Transcendence Second Layer Qi Blood: 1,789/100,000

Cultivation Technique: [Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Integration 142/150]

[Stone-Throwing Skill: 12/12]

[Yin Talisman Technique: Entry Level 0/1,000]

In the next instant, the large characters [Vigorous in Old Age] glowed with golden-purple light, and [Yin Talisman Technique: Entry Level 0/1,000] changed to [Yin Talisman Technique: Entry Level 0/20].

Lin Xuankong couldn't help but be surprised.

When I was cultivating the Pine Crane Longevity Technique, it required 3,000 proficiency points to reach the Initial Glimpse realm. Now, cultivating the difficult and arduous Yin Talisman Technique requires only 1,000 proficiency points, just a bit more than the relatively simple Stone-Throwing Skill. It seems my physique is highly compatible with the Pine Crane Longevity Technique, but even more so with the Yin Talisman Technique, and the compatibility isn't just slightly better!

In his joy, he looked at the Visualization Jade Stone again, only to see that the marks on it had suddenly changed dramatically!

Chapter 60: Terrifying Talent, A Day to Construct the Thunder Root

At this moment, the originally chaotic and disordered marks on the jade, which resembled the haphazard scrawls left by a hundred monkeys urinating, actually began to reveal certain patterns within Lin Xuankong's vision!

That feeling was like when people gaze at the starry sky; facing countless stars, some can only see large clumps, while others can recognize the Big Dipper, the Twenty-Eight Constellations, Leo, Andromeda, and Sagittarius.

Concentrating on visualizing the hidden patterns within the marks, Lin Xuankong gradually felt that the countless acupoints within his body corresponded to the numerous marks on the jade.

Soon after, from the locations of his Dantian and Brain Mansion Life Plate, two streams of Qi Blood began to gently circulate automatically. These two streams flowed along the Chong Vessel, Belt Vessel, Yin Linking Vessel, Yang Linking Vessel, Yin Heel Vessel, and Yang Heel Vessel—the six extraordinary meridians—as well as the twelve main meridians. They operated continuously, finally rushing into the Conception and Governing Vessels before swirling back into his Dantian.

After this process repeated for about the time it takes to drink three cups of tea, Lin Xuankong felt the countless marks on the jade before him suddenly shine brightly.

At the same time, within his body, those two streams of Qi Blood—originating from his Dantian and Life Plate—suddenly transformed into two extremely small Divine Thunders within his Dantian.

Though these two small Divine Thunders were tiny, they were like two Divine Dragons, full of mysterious divine charm and extremely lively and active. They constantly wandered and twisted within his Dantian, teasing and absorbing the Qi Blood there. When Lin Xuankong's Heart Spirit moved slightly, the two small Divine Thunders obeyed his will perfectly, moving left when directed left, right when directed right, up and down, spinning in place, and hopping about.

Lin Xuankong's heart gradually filled with joy as enlightenment dawned upon him. It seems I've nurtured two Divine Thunder Roots in the time it takes for three cups of tea! Is it really this simple to nurture Divine Thunder Roots? According to Xu Bei, the Yin Talisman Technique is extremely difficult to cultivate. Without guidance, one might not master it even in ten years... That fellow was surely bluffing!

At this moment, Lin Xuankong heard someone calling out beside him, "Senior Brother Lin, Senior Brother Lin, are you alright?"

Immersed in his cultivation, Lin Xuankong's Heart Spirit stirred, and he awakened. However, as he sensed the external world, he suddenly felt his Heart Spirit utterly fatigued, and he was dizzy and dazed, as if he hadn't slept for days and nights from constantly watching action movies!

Dizzy and dazed, he ignored Gu Beicheng's calls from beside him. He looked at the Visualization Jade with some apprehension and thought, I can't believe visualizing this jade to cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique not only exhausts Qi Blood but also consumes so much Heart Spirit! Is it because I'm old and my vitality is declining, or did my cultivation go awry? That shouldn't be it; the Divine Thunder Roots have already appeared!

Gu Beicheng saw his silence and nervously spoke, "Senior Brother Lin, are you alright? Just now I saw your face turn pale and your Qi Blood constantly surging. I was afraid you might go astray while cultivating the Yin Talisman Technique and harm your Heart Spirit!"

Lin Xuankong secretly circulated his Qi Blood and rested for a moment. Once the dizziness vanished, he finally said, "It's nothing. I just got a bit dizzy after visualizing this jade for the time it takes to drink three cups of tea."

"A bit dizzy?" Gu Beicheng's expression became even more anxious.

Lin Xuankong, thinking of the two Divine Thunder Roots that had just appeared in his Dantian, couldn't help but ask, "Steward Gu, what was it like when you first cultivated a Divine Thunder Root within your body?"

Gu Beicheng frowned upon hearing this. "Cultivating the Yin Talisman Technique is incredibly challenging," he said. "Nurturing the first Divine Thunder Root is no easy feat. Back then, I had just gained the qualification to cultivate. Under Steward Xua's guidance, I visualized this Transmission Jade daily. Every day, my Heart Spirit would be exhausted, and my Qi Blood depleted.

"It took me over two months to finally nurture that first Divine Thunder Root. At the time, the Divine Thunder Root within my Dantian was minuscule. I had to exhaust all my Qi Blood daily just to gradually strengthen it.

"Senior Brother Lin, you've only just begun your cultivation; you mustn't be impatient for results. The patterns on these Transmission Jades were left by the sect's founding master. The lightning-like marks on them are exceedingly intricate and contain profound power. Visualizing them is extremely draining on both Heart Spirit and Qi Blood. Even young Martial Cultivators with ample Heart Spirit and abundant Qi Blood should never visualize for longer than the time it takes for three cups of tea per day. At your age... you absolutely must not exceed that limit!"

Upon hearing this, the worry that had surfaced in Lin Xuankong's heart immediately vanished. So, the extreme fatigue I felt in my Heart Spirit wasn't because I'm old and my vitality is declining, nor was it because my cultivation went awry... It's because the Transmission Jade itself is incredibly draining on the Heart Spirit! It's the same for everyone; they can only visualize the jade for the time it takes to drink three cups of tea!

However, Gu Beicheng, hailed as a one-in-ten-thousand Four-Seal Genius, actually took more than two months to cultivate his first Divine Thunder Root? And here I am, with two Divine Thunder Roots in my Dantian... I cultivated two of them on my very first day!

[Yin Talisman Technique: Entry Level 1/20]

I haven't even started nurturing these Divine Thunder Roots yet, and my proficiency in the Yin Talisman Technique has already increased by one point! If I expend my Qi Blood to nurture them today, I might increase my proficiency even more! I truly am exceptionally compatible with the Yin Talisman Technique! And with the help of my Vigorous in Old Age Life Plate, my cultivation speed for the Yin Talisman Technique is terrifyingly fast! I wonder, before I reach the Initial Glimpse stage, how many Divine Thunder Roots will I be able to nurture? This will determine the power of the Yin Talisman Thunder I can wield in the future... As I recall, Han Lu had five thunders, Xu Bei had six, Gu Beicheng has nine, and the Charming Chief Steward apparently has eleven...