

Stronger 71

Chapter 71: Demonic Genius Stunned by Yin Talisman, Charming Chief Steward Presents Treasure Elixir

Lin Xuankong, who was in the crowd, was taken aback. As expected of the Boss, you figured out the truth so quickly.

"Impossible! If it's a Nine-Seal Talent, why hide it?"

Wu Liangye took a large gulp from his wine gourd, his face slightly flushed. "Such a world-shocking Nine-Seal Talent, comparable to the talent of our Ancestral Founder! If revealed, the Sect would undoubtedly spare no effort in cultivating him!"

Everyone fell silent upon hearing Wu Liangye's words. He was right; which genius wouldn't want the best resources?

Ma Jiang thoughtfully rolled the dice in his hand and said, "Maybe this person prefers to keep a low profile, not one for flaunting, and just likes to cultivate quietly. Or perhaps this Nine-Seal Genius doesn't lack resources at the moment!"

Lin Xuankong looked at Ma Jiang in surprise. The Boss guessed what I was thinking again! How in sync are we?

However, the Boss and many Stewards were all wrong. What Nine Seals and Eighteen Thunder Roots? I am the Twenty-four Divine Thunder Roots!

"Sigh, who is this genius, anyway? Why be so low-profile? If I had such an earth-shattering talent, I'd want the whole world to know! This peerless genius is making a terrible mistake! A huge mistake! An extraordinary mistake!" Lin Jiao suddenly lamented.

Hearing Lin Jiao's words, Hu Shuo, who was kneeling before the Fourth Jade, his already crimson face turning an even deeper red with excitement, roared, "Can't you see the Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards are discussing important matters here? This is something that could influence our Yin Talisman Sect for centuries, a monumental event that could even overhaul the world's power structure! What are you blabbering about? Get back!"

Seeing his master had spoken, Lin Jiao could only grumble and shrink to the back of the crowd.

Ma Jiang, however, shook his head. "Steward Hu, I think Steward Lin Jiao has a point."

He looked at Lin Xuankong. "Xuankong, what do you think?"

Lin Xuankong: ...

In the crowd, Ma Rusong's expression was somewhat dazed. He was clearly greatly shocked by the fact that the Sect had hidden a Nine-Seal Peerless Genius. Very soon, he thought of something and then couldn't help but look at Lin Xuankong, silently thinking: Old man, so what if you're a Silver Jade Steward? Compared to a genius who can shake the entire Yin Talisman Sect, you're not even fit to carry his shoes! No, compared to a monstrous talent who could grow to the power of the Ancestral Founder, you, a Silver Jade Steward, aren't even qualified to lick the soles of his boots!

At this moment, Zhao Yufei, who was extremely proud of her "Eight Gates Celestial Eye" Talent, couldn't help but show a trace of disappointment on her coolly beautiful face, much like Zhou Zhiruo's. No matter how proud she was, she knew that a Nine-Seal Peerless Talent was something that even a hundred of her combined could not hope to match...

In the Yin Talisman Sect, there's actually a Nine-Seal Genius! I really want to know who he is, how old he is, whether he's male or female, and what he looks like, to possess such world-leading talent!

Zhao Yufei's eyes flickered, her emotions incredibly complex.

Unconsciously, her gaze fell on Lin Xuankong, who stood out with his silver hair, and she couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

Lin Xuankong, Lin Xuankong, look at a Nine-Seal Peerless Genius like this! That's what a real big shot looks like! All you did was become a Silver Jade Steward, and you're so eager to let the whole world know, hanging that annoying jade belt and Silver Token on your waist every day. Aren't you worried about straining your old back!

At this moment, the Charming Grand Steward Jiang Yuran's eyes suddenly flashed with a sly light, and she said, "Alright, I have a plan. You may all disperse for now!"

"But remember one thing: the appearance of the second mark on the Fourth Jade, and the possibility of a Nine-Seal Genius in the Sect, must not be leaked. After you return, you must keep it confidential for now, even from your spouses and families! This includes those new disciples outside; make sure they keep their mouths shut. They are not allowed to leave the assembly hall a single step for the time being!"

The many Stewards looked at Jiang Yuran with some confusion. But since it was the Grand Steward's order, everyone could only bow and comply. Even the extremely excited Grand Chief Stewards who had been kneeling before the Fourth Jade had to stand up and comply.

After all the Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards, who were wildly speculating, astonished, and extremely excited, had dispersed, Lin Xuankong also left the assembly hall. He exchanged greetings with Ma Jiang and Han Lu, who were still trying to guess who the genius might be, and then headed towards his own residence.

Just as he was a short distance from the assembly hall, a disciple hurriedly approached. "Steward Lin, Grand Steward Jiang wishes to see you!"

Grand Steward Jiang wants to see me? The Charming Daoist Nun is looking for me? Why is she suddenly looking for me? At this juncture, she's sending someone to find me... Is it because of the Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder mark?

Lin Xuankong was a bit surprised. It couldn't be... I was very sure, absolutely certain that no one saw me use the Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder Divine Technique! In that case, why would Jiang Yuran suspect me? If she really does suspect me and questions me, how should I respond... Lin Xuankong pondered for a moment and then followed the disciple to the Grand Steward's Tower.

In the hall of the Grand Steward's Tower, an incense burner sat on a rune-decorated sandalwood table, wisps of smoke continuously rising from it. The fragrance filling the hall was invigorating, clearly indicating that the incense in the burner was of considerable value!

Lin Xuankong walked to the sandalwood table, cupped his hands, and said, "Grand Steward!"

Jiang Yuran frowned at him for a few moments, then suddenly sighed. "I can't change the list for the Demon Slaying Conference. After sending a Flying Eagle Letter to my father, there has been no reply... You might indeed have to participate in the extremely dangerous Demon Slaying Conference!"

Lin Xuankong couldn't help but look up at Jiang Yuran. She called me here to talk about the Demon Slaying Conference?

He thought about it and nodded. "Since joining the Yin Talisman Sect, the Sect has treated me well. Representing the Sect in the Demon Slaying Conference is only right and proper!"

Seeing his natural expression, seemingly without any resentment, Jiang Yuran nodded slightly. She then opened a Jade Box that was placed by the incense burner on the table. "Joining the Demon Slaying Conference requires arduous battles for over twenty days. As the Grand Steward, I cannot fight in your place, but these three Turtle-Poria Elixirs are a small token from the Sect and myself. They can help replenish your Qi Blood during battles and grant you a better chance of survival!"

"The other five will each get one, and you get three. These are all that remain from the two batches of elixirs my father successfully refined last year; otherwise, I would certainly have given you more!"

"Thank you, Grand Steward!" Lin Xuankong looked up in slight surprise.

Turtle-Poria Elixirs could continuously replenish large amounts of Qi Blood and greatly extend one's lifespan; it was the elixir he most coveted within the Yin Talisman Sect.

Receiving Turtle-Poria Elixirs again is a delightful surprise! If participating in the Demon Slaying Conference always yielded Turtle-Poria Elixirs from the Sect, I'd wish for the conference to be held every month! But why did the Charming Grand Steward give me three while others only got one?

A hint of expectation appeared in Jiang Yuran's eyes. "Giving you two extra Turtle-Poria Elixirs isn't for free. I have a task for you!"

Lin Xuankong said, "Grand Steward, please tell me."

Jiang Yuran continued, "You were present today when the Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder mark appeared. That was the second mark... Our Sect is undoubtedly hiding a genius with Nine Seals and Eighteen Thunder Roots.

"For the entire Yin Talisman Sect, this is a matter of utmost significance, one that could affect our thousands of disciples and the Yin Talisman Sect's destiny for the next millennium! This genius is incredibly important to the Yin Talisman Sect; they are our hope for becoming a top-tier Major Sect!

"What I need you to do is find a way to locate this hidden genius. You previously captured the Flying Thief. Although you kept some details hidden and I don't know exactly how you found him, you managed to find that incredibly elusive Flying Thief. Therefore, I believe you have a way to find this genius too!

"I hope you can find him soon, preferably before the Demon Slaying Conference. If you succeed, there will be a hefty reward. Whatever you desire, I can help you obtain it!"

After speaking, Jiang Yuran's eyes shone, her charming face slightly flushed with excitement, her gaze filled with intense, fervent hope.

Lin Xuankong was somewhat speechless. The Charming Grand Steward offered such a tempting reward; anything I want could be granted... And the task is for me to investigate myself?

Chapter 72: The Choice of the Spiritual Beast, The Big Seller of Three Hundred Forehead Scales

Lin Xuankong couldn't help but look up at Jiang Yuran. Since you're asking me to investigate myself, I won't hold back!

He stared at Jiang Yuran and said, "Since the Chief Steward values me so much, I, Xuankong, will definitely uncover that hidden genius!"

This matter is too simple. Isn't it just a matter of me revealing myself!

The Charming Chief Steward was known for being carefree and always kept her word. So, what reward should I ask for in two or three months? Lin Xuankong pondered.

Jiang Yuran saw the determination in his eyes and his apparent confidence in uncovering the hidden genius, which made her smile.

Lin Xuankong thought for a moment and said, "But, Chief Steward, have you considered this? Since he's hiding, he certainly doesn't want his identity to be discovered. So, it's better not to assign too many people to this investigation."

Jiang Yuran smiled brightly. "I only want you to investigate him secretly; I haven't assigned anyone else. Besides, it's not necessary to expose his identity to everyone! You investigate quietly. When you have results, remember not to alert him. Just quietly inform me alone, and I have my ways to win him over!

"Since he wants to remain hidden, I naturally won't expose him and cause unnecessary trouble. Today, I told everyone not to discuss this matter and to keep it a secret for this very reason!"

Upon hearing this, Lin Xuankong looked at Jiang Yuran again. The Charming Chief Steward's approach and intentions are very much to my liking. It seems that once I grow stronger and have the means to protect myself, I might not need to hide this from Ma Jiang and her after all!

As for her promise of 'ask for anything'... I'll go back and think it over carefully!

「In the blink of an eye, another dozen or so days passed.」

During these days, the spirit and energy of the Yin Talisman Sect Members had completely transformed.

Although Jiang Yuran had strictly forbidden the Stewards, Grand Chief Stewards, and others aware of the situation from leaking the news about a "monstrous genius" appearing in the Sect, this didn't stop them from having extremely optimistic expectations for the Sect's future!

Whispers even suggested that the Sect Leader of the Yin Talisman Sect had personally visited Great Marsh Hall to confirm that the second trace was indeed Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder...

These days, whenever the Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards gathered, their most discussed topic was: who exactly *is* that genius?

Moreover, all Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards seemed to be invigorated, tackling their duties with immense passion, practically bustling about with a whirlwind at their heels!

Meanwhile, Lin Xuankong, the cause of all these changes in the Yin Talisman Sect, spent his days immersed in Cultivation.

His progress in the Pine Skill and Yin Talisman Technique advanced steadily and rapidly, bringing him closer to his set Cultivation goals.

[Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Entering the Hall 89/300]

The Pine Crane Longevity Technique was very close to the Mid-grade of Entering the Hall. Lin Xuankong's Explosive Power was also rapidly increasing, and his Transcendence Realm was on the verge of reaching the Mid-grade of the Third Layer.

The increase in his Explosive Power and the terrifying enhancement of his Thunder Technique's might made Lin Xuankong absolutely certain that the current him could defeat the him from twenty days ago with utmost ease!

Additionally, his stats were:

[Lin Xuankong: Remaining Lifespan 46 years and 18 days]

[Perfect Qi Blood: 2,408/100,000]

After consuming three Turtle-Poria Elixirs, his Lifespan had increased by nearly nine years—a full nine years!

His Qi Blood Amount was also increasing rapidly each day...

2,408 points of Qi and Blood Reserves... With such a terrifying Qi Blood Amount, activating Divine Thunder would be like being a humanoid, permanent high-voltage power plant!

「During this time,」

Lii Xiaolan, apart from her Cultivation, spent her days tinkering with those Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls.

According to her, the Huang Family's eldest young miss had already taught her how to cultivate Spiritual Beasts. Once she finished processing those Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls, she could start selecting Exotic Beasts and look for suitable targets to nurture!

This filled Lin Xuankong with anticipation.

He had been quite envious of Zhao Yufei's Dragon Blood Treasure Dog back then. Which man wouldn't like to have a loyal and majestic beast by his side! An old man regaining his youthful passion, holding a yellow beast on the left and a blue one on the right!

Once nurtured, Spiritual Beasts would be in tune with their owner's thoughts and extremely loyal. It was said that with abundant resources, Spiritual Beasts grew remarkably fast, much faster than ordinary Martial Cultivators!

Moreover, Spiritual Beasts could fight Martial Cultivators of the same Realm, and some special Exotic Beasts even possessed powerful Abnormal Techniques, allowing them to easily defeat opponents of the Same Tier!

I wonder what kind of Exotic Beast the Young Lady will ultimately help me choose, and what kind of Spiritual Beast she'll nurture! An enormous Dragon Blood Fierce Dog bigger than an ox? A Divine Eagle that travels ten thousand miles in a day? An Exotic Spirit Cat that can slay Same Tier Martial Artists? A fish as beautiful as a fairy?

It's a pity the Young Lady has been so secretive these past few days, never telling me her plans. She's just teasing me so blatantly... It seems I'll have to order fewer dishes at meals these days...

「One day, early morning,」

After finishing his Cultivation, a high-spirited Lin Xuankong had just arrived at the entrance of the Cow and Horse Street stronghold when he suddenly saw a Martial Cultivator hopping towards him from the street entrance on a single right leg. It was Steward Han Lu, who was at the Early Stage of the Second Layer.

What surprised Lin Xuankong, however, was that Steward Han Lu had originally broken his right leg, which was why he often hopped around. How come his right leg is healed now, but his left leg is broken?

It was said that when Chief Steward Jiang treated Gu Beicheng with Marsh Python Gall, she had also given Han Lu a bit of the gall, so his right leg should have healed long ago! So who broke his left leg now?

"What happened, Steward Han?" Lin Xuankong greeted him, somewhat puzzled.

Chapter 73: The Choice of the Spiritual Beast, The Big Seller of Three Hundred Forehead Scales

Han Lu, covered in blood, landed beside Lin Xuankong. Supporting his body with one leg, his voice was tinged with urgency, "My master, my master..."

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong's expression immediately changed, and he grabbed Han Lu's shoulder. "What happened to Steward Ma?"

Han Lu frowned and said, "My master is injured! Yesterday, while my master and I were transporting materials from Four-Direction City, we were ambushed by bandits using Enchanting Fragrance. Nearly forty Martial Cultivators of the Second Layer and above attacked us. That terrifying Enchanting Fragrance significantly reduces a Martial Cultivator's Explosive Power... But my master fought desperately and eventually repelled those bandit Martial Cultivators. Unfortunately, my master also sustained serious injuries! Now, my master, along with the other disciples, has returned to the Mule Street Branch. I tried to persuade him to rest immediately and not work while injured, but he scolded me! My master has always liked you. Go and persuade him!"

Why is he still busy when he's injured? Not resting properly, this boss of mine... Lin Xuankong nodded and glanced at Han Lu's broken leg. "First, go treat your leg injury. I'll go check on Steward Ma!"

After saying that, his face darkened as he headed towards the Mule Street Branch.

Bandits... How could there be so many powerful bandits in the Great Marsh Prefecture? There must be something fishy about this!

Upon entering the Mule Street Branch, he saw numerous disciples moving large quantities of medicinal herbs and materials from carriages towards the first warehouse. In a corner of the Cultivation Field, several physicians were treating the wounds of dozens of injured disciples.

Lin Xuankong stopped a disciple and asked a few questions. He then learned that Ma Jiang had been summoned by Chief Steward Jiang to the General Manager's Tower.

He quickly headed towards the General Manager's Tower. Just as he reached the entrance, he was stopped by two disciples.

One of the disciples cupped his hands and said, "Steward Lin, Chief Steward Jiang is discussing important matters with Chief Steward Gao and Steward Ma. Please wait here for a moment; I'll go in and inform them..."

"Let Steward Lin come in!" Chief Steward Jiang's voice came from inside the tower.

Upon entering the General Manager's Tower, Lin Xuankong quickly walked over to Ma Jiang, whose face was pale and covered in blood. "Boss, your injuries?"

Ma Jiang waved his hand. "Minor injuries! Just a few ruptured intestines and two shattered kidneys!"

Lin Xuankong's eyebrows immediately tightened. Kidneys gone, and he calls those minor injuries? Would being ground to dust be considered a major injury then?

Jiang Yuran spoke, "Steward Lin, rest assured. I have already given Steward Ma a drop of Marsh Python Gall Liquid. After he uses it, his flesh will regenerate quickly, leaving no wounds."

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong finally relaxed. However, seeing the mangled flesh and exposed organs in Ma Jiang's abdomen, he couldn't help but clench his fists tightly.

Jiang Yuran looked at Ma Jiang. "Steward Ma, are you certain that one of the three bandit leaders was Zhao Dalong of the Black Tiger Gang, the one who wields the Profound Iron Whip?"

Ma Jiang nodded definitively. "Few Martial Cultivators use the Profound Iron Whip. Although that leader wore a Profound Iron Mask, the sound his bones made during full-force attacks was very similar to the Black Tiger Gang's Fierce Tiger Roar Bone Technique. Unfortunately, I was affected by that Enchanting Fragrance and could only exert Early Stage Third Layer power... Otherwise, Zhao Dalong, wielder of the Profound Iron Whip, and the other two leaders would have been no match for me!"

Nearby, Chief Steward Gao Yunchao's eyes flickered. "The only thing that can significantly lower a Martial Cultivator's power in a short time is the Spirit Snake Gang's secret Soft Bone Enchanting Fragrance. Combined with the Profound Iron Whip and the Bone Roar Technique, it should be Zhao Dalong of the Black Tiger Hill City Branch, a Mid-grade Third Layer Steward. No one else would have access to such an Enchanting Fragrance! With the Demon Slaying Conference approaching, many Black Tiger Gang experts are arriving from various branches, so it's normal for him to come to the Great Marsh Hall!"

Jiang Yuran's beautiful face changed, anger flaring in her eyes. "The Black Tiger Gang is becoming increasingly arrogant! If Steward Ma hadn't been on this mission, this entire batch of important materials would have been destroyed by them! Wearing a Profound Iron Mask... Such a self-deceiving act! Do they really think I, Jiang Yuran, will tolerate it? I don't care what Zhao Dalong's status is. So, he wants to stir up trouble and play dirty tricks? I, Jiang Yuran, have never been a kind person! Chief Steward Gao, immediately arrange for some experts to secretly intercept the Black Tiger Gang's material transport routes. As for what to do, I don't need to spell it out for you, do I!"

A hint of killing intent appeared on Gao Yunchao's face. He rose and said, "Your subordinate will see to it at once!"

Watching Gao Yunchao leave quickly, Ma Jiang's eyes showed a trace of excitement. Although our Chief Steward is a bit impulsive, not as steady as the Hall Master, this is much more satisfying... When dealing with the insidious and vicious Black Tiger Gang, one must naturally be even more ruthless! Once I recover, I'll also secretly cause some trouble for those Black Tiger Gang scoundrels!

However, when Ma Jiang turned and saw the anger in Lin Xuankong's eyes, he couldn't help but shake his head, a trace of worry in his own. "Xuankong, let Chief Steward Gao handle this matter. You mustn't act impulsively. Zhao Dalong and the others are all Mid-grade Third Layer; they're not people you can deal with! My injuries will heal quickly; it's not worth getting worked up over that filth! Besides, I gained some insights from this battle. Perhaps this misfortune will turn into a blessing!"

Jiang Yuran then said, "Zhao Dalong and his cohorts are indeed formidable! Steward Lin, you should focus on the task I assigned you recently. That matter is countless times more important than dealing with the Black Tiger Gang!"

「After leaving the General Manager's Tower」

Lin Xuankong's face remained somewhat grim. In the Yin Talisman Sect, the person he cared about most was Ma Jiang, who had always valued and supported him!

If not for the Sect's Marsh Python Gall, Ma Jiang would definitely have died from his injuries this time... The Black Tiger Gang truly is my fated enemy! My Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder Divine Technique has progressed significantly recently. I wonder what effect it would have on Mid-grade Third Layer Martial Cultivators? I just don't know where Zhao Dalong is now... I need to find a way to investigate. I'll remember this debt!

Frowning in thought, he walked to his Cow and Horse Street residence. Just as he entered the Steward's Tower, Yang Mountain's voice came from outside, "Steward, I finally found a seller for the Forehead Scales!"

"Come in and tell me!" Lin Xuankong said. This Yang Mountain is indeed conscientious. He completes every task I give him.

"Who is the seller? Where is the transaction? What's the price?"

Yang Mountain cupped his hands and said, "It's one of the many auction items announced by the Great Marsh Prefecture's official auction house. The auction will be held in three days. There are three hundred Marsh Python Forehead Scales, not sold individually. The starting bid is twelve thousand silver taels, averaging forty silver taels per scale. This is nearly ten silver taels higher than the previous starting prices at the auction house. The only unfortunate thing is the price; it's too expensive!"

Three hundred Marsh Python Forehead Scales, plus the ones I already have, will be more than enough to craft the Exorcism Armor! With these three hundred, I can definitely create an incredibly powerful and unparalleled defensive Exorcism Armor before the Demon Slaying Conference. Wearing a full set of Exorcism Armor, dealing with Zhao Dalong and the others from the Black Tiger Gang to vent my anger and my boss's will be much easier! Most importantly, the Exorcism Armor can easily resist the Demon Qi contamination and attacks from Demons... To acquire a large number of Treasures at the Demon Slaying Conference and fight Demons more easily, the Exorcism Armor is a must-have!

But the price of these Marsh Python Forehead Scales... Not sold individually, and a starting bid of twelve thousand silver taels. So expensive, it's worth millions of baked biscuits! However, it's understandable. Ever since the Yin Talisman Gate Outer City territory lost the Marsh Python People, the production of Forehead Scales has decreased significantly. Plus, with the Demon Slaying Conference approaching, others might also be making Exorcism Equipment, so the price of Forehead Scales will only continue to rise!

After a moment of thought, Lin Xuankong decisively stood up and walked out. "Yang Mountain, you've done well on this matter. Tomorrow, I will apply to Steward Ma Jiang to promote you to Deputy Steward!"

Yang Mountain's face lit up with joy. "Thank you, Steward!"

「After leaving the residence」

Lin Xuankong returned to his wooden building. After informing the Young Lady, he took out all his savings.

The silver taels from selling materials, combined with his monthly stipends and rewards, totaled eight thousand silver taels—a large pile of white Silver Yuanbao.

However, this sum of eight thousand silver taels, though seemingly substantial, was still four thousand silver taels short of the starting bid. Winning the auction would require even more... It was so hard to find such a large quantity of Forehead Scales. If I can't gather enough silver taels, it will be as disgusting as a cooked duck flying away. Miss this chance, and there won't be another like it! The Battle Armor is extremely important for the upcoming Demon Slaying Conference; it's a matter of life and death. The

Battle Armor will also greatly enhance my strength. But how can I quickly gather ten to twenty thousand silver taels?

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The opportunity cannot be missed; the Exorcism Armor must be secured!

Lin Xuankong pondered for a moment, then spoke, "Besides these, we have about four hundred portions of medicinal herbs at home. The price of medicinal herbs in Great Marsh Prefecture is increasing daily. It's said that in the black market, any single portion can sell for fifty or sixty taels. Selling sixty or seventy portions should net us close to four thousand taels. But at the auction, there will definitely be competitive bidding. Merely preparing the starting bid won't be enough..."

Lii Xiaolan frowned slightly.

"A few days ago, I went to ask Miss about cultivating Exotic Beasts, and she shared some news with me.

"The third medicinal herb production area in Great Marsh Prefecture was attacked by several extremely powerful Demons a few days ago. The Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect and the officials dispatched a few Elders and experts to resist. Although they managed to fend off this wave, who knows what the future holds!

"The price of medicinal herbs will definitely soar even more dramatically. It's best not to touch these Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup herbs!"

If the medicinal herbs can't be touched, where will we get so much silver on such short notice?

Lin Xuankong frowned incessantly. After a moment of thought, recalling how Ma Jiang had been severely injured by a Black Tiger Gang expert today, he stood up decisively and said:

"The Black Tiger Gang has always been extortionate and plundering. Zhang Wu, that scoundrel, was a Leader in the Black Tiger Gang for many years, extorting from people all that time. Now he's a Deputy Steward. He must be incredibly wealthy, with at least a few thousand taels! This time, let's make him bleed!"

Lii Xiaolan's eyes lit up, "Then I'll go to Zhang Wu's house right now!"

Such a delicate young lady, trying to act like Robin Hood!

Lin Xuankong shook his head repeatedly. "No, *I* will go to Zhang Wu's house. We still haven't settled the score for his designs on my wife!"

Lii Xiaolan raised an eyebrow upon hearing this. "Hmm, you go then! But remember, last time you already alerted him. This time, scout the area first. If there's danger, get out quickly. If things really go south, we'll make a run for it together!"

Lin Xuankong was somewhat speechless. How could a man admit defeat! Also, what is all this strange jargon? Could it get any weirder? She must have read too many novels at the Huang Family's place!

He turned his head to look out the window.

To avenge himself and Ma Jiang, and also to obtain the almighty Exorcism Armor, he was determined to ransack the Black Tiger Gang Deputy Steward's house—he would plunder it clean, leaving not a single tile or blade of grass behind!

「...」

On South Street, in the Black Tiger Gang's main hall, a grand chamber.

A man in his thirties, with a square face and a stern expression, dressed in a gold-patterned jacket, sat in a pear blossom chair, turning a Jade Gourd in his hand.

Three Grand Chief Stewards and twenty Black Tiger Gang Stewards sat on either side of him. Dozens of Black Tiger Gang Deputy Stewards stood straight and solemn, lined up on both sides of the hall. Outside the hall, more than a hundred Black Tiger Gang Leaders, wearing black clothes with yellow patterns, stood.

The square-faced man began to speak slowly,

"The list for the Demon Slaying Conference has been finalized.

"During this time, all those selected must cultivate diligently, striving to achieve significant results in the Demon Slaying Conference!

"The Hall Master has decreed: anyone who obtains a Demon Pearl during the conference will receive personal instruction in the Black Tiger Three Techniques from the Hall Master himself, be granted the position of Golden Tiger, earn three months of cultivation in the Black Tiger Secret Realm, and be allowed to wear the Black Soul Wondrous Jade for one year!

"Furthermore, the Hall Master has issued a special order concerning the Conical Hat Guest who provoked the Black Tiger Gang recently... If anyone can track him down and seize the Twin Vine Demon Pearl from his possession, they too will be awarded the position of Golden Tiger and the right to wear the Black Soul Wondrous Jade for one year!

"When has our Black Tiger Gang ever endured such provocation? Even the Huang Family and the Yin Talisman Sect give us a wide berth... Yet some skulking little thief dares to repeatedly run wild over the Black Tiger Gang!

"The Conical Hat Guest's head will be used to consecrate the banners for the Demon Slaying Conference!"

Upon hearing of such rich rewards, the many Stewards, Deputy Stewards, and Leaders of the Black Tiger Gang immediately shouted in excitement, "We obey!"

The Black Tiger Three Techniques, which include the Fierce Tiger Roar Bone Technique, are three Secret Techniques of the Black Tiger Gang. Even Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards are only qualified to choose one Secret Technique to cultivate! As for the benefits accompanying the Golden Tiger position and access to the Black Tiger Secret Realm, they are comparable to those of the Silver Jade position within the Yin Talisman Sect!

Among all these rewards, the opportunity to wear the Black Soul Wondrous Jade for a year was the most precious!

The Black Soul Wondrous Jade, as the Black Tiger Gang's most powerful wondrous treasure, was in no way inferior in value to a full set of Exorcism Armor!

Even Elder Liy, the Leader of the Black Tiger Gang, renowned as the foremost jade refining master in the Great Marsh Prefecture, requires seven to eight years to refine a single piece.

The majority of the Wondrous Jade refined by the Black Tiger Gang Leader is offered as tribute to the Royal Family of the Great Xia Dynasty. To become a tribute for the Great Xia Royal Family, which dominates the Martial Dao, truly demonstrates how precious this Black Soul Wondrous Jade is!

Apart from those offered as tribute, the few remaining pieces of Black Soul Wondrous Jade are held by the Gang Leader and the three Hall Masters. Ordinarily, even esteemed Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards rarely have the chance to use it!

The fact that the Black Tiger Gang's few Hall Masters dominate others of the Same Tier in combat prowess is attributed not only to their Exorcism Armor and Demon Pearls but also to their possession of the Black Soul Wondrous Jade!

Only the Royal Family and Fifth Layer Martial Cultivators at the Hall Master level could typically access the Black Soul Wondrous Jade. Imagining the opportunity to wear it, the Leaders, Stewards, and Grand Chief Stewards of the Black Tiger Gang showed intense anticipation, all rubbing their hands in eagerness!

Among the crowd, Steward Zhao Dalong, seated on the right side, also showed a trace of eagerness.

He secretly touched the pouch at his waist. For participating in this Demon Slaying Conference, his father had given him the Black Soul Wondrous Jade he had cherished for twenty years... Still, if he could kill the Conical Hat Guest and obtain the highly honored Golden Tiger position, that would truly be a great achievement!

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Liy Ruofeng observed the expressions of his subordinates and nodded slightly. With twenty Stewards of about the Third Layer, dozens of Deputy Stewards, over a hundred Second Layer Leaders, and thousands of Gang Members, this inescapable net had been cast. The Conical Hat Guest would find it difficult to escape!

Once the many Black Tiger Leaders and Stewards had hurriedly left the hall after receiving their tasks, Vice Hall Master Liy Ruofeng turned to Zhang Wu. Zhang Wu respectfully cupped his fists and said, "Thank you, Vice Hall Master, for the Zemang Treasure Medicine to heal my injuries, and for casting this inescapable net. That Conical Hat Guest absolutely cannot escape from your grasp, Vice Hall Master!"

Liy Ruofeng nodded slightly. He hadn't expected that, right after advancing to the Late Stage of the Fourth Layer and emerging from his seclusion, he would encounter such a tremendous opportunity involving the Conical Hat Guest and the Twin Vine Demon Pearl... The Conical Hat Guest possesses the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, which naturally makes him invincible against those of the same tier and even gives him a chance to challenge those of higher tiers. However, according to the observations of several Stewards at Zhang Wu's residence, the force the Conical Hat Guest exerted when breaking through the bridal chamber wall was only around the Mid-grade of the Second Layer. With such ant-like strength, even if he possesses the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, he cannot escape the inescapable net I've laid! Besides, with strength like that, how could he possibly be worthy of possessing the Twin Vine Demon Pearl? This Treasure rightfully belongs to the Black Tiger Gang!

Liy Ruofeng stood up and walked outside. "Zhang Wu, although your injuries have healed, the suffering you endured cannot be ignored. No one is allowed to bully the brothers under me, Liy Ruofeng! The Conical Hat Guest wants you dead, and there are people in Great Marsh Prefecture who want to see our Black Tiger Gang become a laughingstock. But I, Liy Ruofeng, will ensure you live a long and healthy life! I'll make sure everyone in Great Marsh Prefecture knows you're alive and well! I'd like to see if that Conical Hat Guest dares to target my, Liy Ruofeng's, men again! From today, I will have Zhao Dalong, along with Stewards Zhang Yihu and Qian Han, secretly move into your residence. All three have advanced to the Third Layer. Zhao Dalong, son of Hall Master Zhao of Hill City, is even at the Mid-grade of the Third Layer and possesses formidable strength! Even if the Conical Hat Guest has the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, Zhao Dalong leading the other two can protect you and kill him! However, this secret arrangement is known only to you and me, and must not be disclosed to anyone else!"

Zhang Wu was overjoyed. "Thank you, Vice Hall Master! I bid you farewell, Vice Hall Master!"

After leaving the hall, Liy Ruofeng sat in a large sedan chair carried by several porters, twirling a Jade Gourd in his hand, a trace of anticipation in his eyes. With the Black Soul Wondrous Jade as a reward, everyone in Great Marsh Hall will undoubtedly go crazy searching for information. With this inescapable net, the Conical Hat Guest absolutely cannot escape! Moreover, once news of Zhang Wu's full recovery

spreads, if that Conical Hat Guest truly intends to target Zhang Wu... I hope he won't be able to hold himself back! With these three experts stationed at Zhang Residence, if the Conical Hat Guest dares to show up, there's absolutely no way he can escape! Once I get the Demon Pearl from the Conical Hat Guest, I'll borrow the invaluable Nine-Scaly Armor from the Hall Master. I'll have my brother, Liy Ruohong, wear the armor and equip the Demon Pearl for the Demon Slaying Conference. He will surely reap great rewards and will very likely win the title of Demon Slaying Champion. If he does, he might gain the favor of Elder Hua of the Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect and could even become a disciple of a sect affiliated with them!

「...」

The moon hung high in the sky.

In the main hall of Zhang Residence, Zhang Wu sat at the lower end of the banquet table. He raised his wine cup, a respectful look on his face, and said, "You three Stewards are all prominent figures in our Black Tiger Gang, your might renowned throughout Great Marsh Prefecture! Even among the many Stewards, your strength is absolutely top-tier! In the coming days, Zhang Wu will be under your protection, and I am deeply grateful. Rest assured, the women I've prepared for you three are absolute top beauties with top skills! Additionally, I've prepared six thousand taels of silver and one hundred eighty portions of Qi Replenishing Soup ingredients. Although these things might not be much to you three, they represent a small token of my, Little Wu's, sincerity!"

While speaking, Zhang Wu couldn't help but gaze at Steward Zhao Dalong, his eyes showing a fervent expression. This esteemed Steward Zhao Dalong has exceptional talent. He reached the Mid-grade of the Third Layer in just twelve years of cultivation, a genius among geniuses in the Black Tiger Gang's younger generation. Even though he's usually stationed in Hill City, the name 'Profound Iron Whip Zhao Dalong' is still renowned throughout Great Marsh, far more famous than some Gu Beicheng from the Yin Talisman Sect! Especially his Profound Iron Whip, forged from Profound Iron combined with a Marsh Python Forehead Scale; it's one of the most famous pieces of Exorcism Equipment in the Black Tiger Gang's Hill City Hall. With him and two other Stewards guarding my residence, if that Conical Hat Guest dares to come, he'll be like a turtle in a jar—a sitting duck!

Steward Zhang Yihu glanced at Zhang Wu. "With orders from the Vice Hall Master, Vice Steward Zhang, there's no need to be so courteous! However, Vice Steward Zhang, your ability to find all sorts of beautiful women is truly a specialty within our Black Tiger Gang! I, for one, am rather looking forward to tonight's 'gentle haven'!"

Hearing these words from the Third Layer Steward Zhang Yihu, Vice Steward Zhang Wu quickly laughed along.

After they chatted and drank strong liquor for a while, their eyes gradually became heavy with drink.

Steward Zhang Yihu raised his cup to Steward Zhao Dalong. "Steward Zhao, yesterday you nearly killed Ma Jiang of the Yin Talisman Sect on the spot! To achieve such a feat at the young age of twenty-six is truly admirable. Come, I toast you!"

Zhao Dalong drained his cup, a hint of pride flashing in his eyes. "If Ma Jiang hadn't possessed the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand, how could I possibly have allowed him to protect those supplies yesterday!"

"Ma Jiang?" Zhang Wu's face showed surprise. "I heard that Ma Jiang of the Yin Talisman Sect advanced to the late stage of the Third Layer, nearing Perfection, a long time ago. He once killed powerful Evil Lizard Demon People and his strength is the greatest among the Yin Talisman Sect's many Stewards! For Steward Zhao, at such a young age, to be able to heavily injure Ma Jiang, I, Zhang Wu, am truly impressed beyond words, utterly impressed!"

Just as Zhang Wu finished speaking—

BANG! A muffled explosion suddenly erupted.

He was struck hard from behind. His body twisted as he flew several yards, soaring over the entire banquet table before heavily crashing into the wall. Then, with a THUD, he fell to the ground, all five points of his body hitting the floor!

Zhang Wu immediately let out a miserable howl.

Lin Xuankong, wearing a conical hat and Ghost Face Mask, now stood where Zhang Wu had just been. His slightly hoarse voice rang out, "Now *that's* what you call 'all five points touching the ground'!"

The three elite Stewards of the Black Tiger Gang—Zhang Yihu, Zhao Dalong, and Qian Han—who had been pleasantly drunk, instantly sobered, their expressions changing drastically. Qi Blood surged through their bodies, expelling all traces of alcohol, and claws extended from their fingertips!

Lin Xuankong, wearing his conical hat, Ghost Face Mask, and black clothes, completely disregarded the threat of these three powerful Stewards. He frowned as he looked at Zhang Wu. The last time I struck, Zhang Wu's spine below the waist was turned to pulp. Even if he didn't die on the spot, he should have only been able to cling to life for a few days at most, absolutely destined to die slowly in fear and agony... Yet the Black Tiger Gang was actually so extravagant, willing to use an incredibly precious Marsh Python Gall to treat a mere early-stage Second Layer like Zhang Wu. The Black Tiger Gang truly lives up to its 'nouveau riche' reputation! It seems that from now on... when I do things, I must cut the weeds and eliminate the roots, scatter the bones and ashes to the four winds! This time, let's start with Zhang Wu and Zhao Dalong!

With this thought, Lin Xuankong looked at the three Black Tiger Gang Stewards slowly closing in on him.

"Conical Hat Guest, the dignity of the Black Tiger Gang cannot be trampled by anyone!" Zhang Yihu snorted coldly, the first to approach Lin Xuankong. "Since you've come, there's a place reserved for you in the Black Tiger Gang's Punishment Hall!"

As he walked, his movements were exceedingly steady, his aura like that of a tiger descending a mountain. The claws extending from his ten fingers were surprisingly not silver-white like those of Bearded, but a dark, metallic black, their tips extremely sharp! Moreover, as he strode forward, those foot-long claws extended and retracted unpredictably, exuding a strange, violent beauty!

Such a profound Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw was immeasurably stronger than that of Bearded, whom Lin Xuankong had previously killed!

Indeed, Third Layer Stewards of the Black Tiger Gang are far beyond what Second Layer Martial Cultivators can compare to!

Zhao Dalong and Qian Han moved to his flanks, vaguely surrounding Lin Xuankong. Intense anticipation filled the eyes of all three as they stared intently at Lin Xuankong, as if the one standing before them wasn't the dangerous Conical Hat Guest, but some extremely alluring beauty!

Zhang Wu, who was "all five points touching the ground," seethed with hatred, "Steward Zhang, Steward Qian, please don't kill him directly! I want him to suffer countless tortures before he dies!"

His eyes radiated intense venom. 'Conical Hat Guest, you actually dared to come! Even if you have the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, you absolutely cannot withstand three powerful Martial Cultivators whose Realms are far above yours! This time, I will definitely have you ground into dust!'

Chapter 76: Aurora Shining Heaven Unleashes Divine Might, Cutting Down Three Layers with Irresistible Force

Zhang Yihu's eyes burned with eagerness, his steps steady as he advanced on Lin Xuankong. According to Vice Hall Master Li's analysis for us three, he thought, this Conical Hat Guest is at most in the late stage of the Second Layer... If I hadn't been drunk earlier, how could he have gotten so close! I'm completely confident I can drain his Qi Blood within a few breaths. I might even be able to gouge out his eyes through the mask and kill him instantly! Even if he uses the Twin Vine Demon Pearl to control me, he can't control Steward Zhao and Steward Qian at the same time! Today, this Conical Hat Guest *must* die!

However, just as these thoughts raced through Zhang Yihu's mind, he suddenly saw the Conical Hat Guest raise his right hand toward them. The gesture resembled how a prostitute, concealed behind a half-closed door, might greet a regular customer. What's he doing? Zhang Yihu frowned. Just then, he was horrified to see the Conical Hat Guest's right hand blaze with a brilliant light.

The light was incredibly terrifying. It was as if dozens, even hundreds, of suns had simultaneously ignited before Zhang Yihu, Zhang Wu, Zhao Dalong, and Qian Han. The extremely dazzling light caused a sudden, piercing pain in their eyes, followed by immediate blindness; they could see nothing at all! In that instant, the clothes on their bodies, the hair on their heads and bodies, all ignited under the scorching light, their entire skin rapidly blistering and ulcerating!

At that moment, if Lin Xuankong's Aurora Heaven-Brightening Technique hadn't been primarily targeting the four of them, the entire Zhang Residence would have been illuminated as bright as day. Even the dozens of streets surrounding the Zhang Residence would have been lit up!

The Aurora Heaven-Brightening Technique was a Thunder Technique formed with ten Divine Thunder Roots. It instantaneously unleashed nearly half the power of the Divine Thunder Roots, its might naturally far surpassing the Divine Thunder Illusion Technique! Even someone with a Five-Seal Talent like Jiang Yuran could only activate it twice in a short period... Of course, this did not apply to Lin Xuankong, who possessed twenty-four Divine Thunder Roots!

"AHHHHH—My eyes! What is this Abnormal Technique?!"

Suddenly faced with this Thunder Technique attack, Zhang Yihu, who was just about to strike, hastily circulated his Qi Blood. He tried to resist the agony of his hair and clothes burning and his skin blistering, raising his hands to cover his eyes, which the terrifying light had instantly destroyed.

"Damn it, my eyes!"

"What the hell is this Abnormal Technique!"

"Don't panic! Watch out for his attacks!"

Panicked and chaotic curses erupted from the men.

In the next instant, Zhang Yihu, who was closest to Lin Xuankong, decisively shielded his entire body with Qi Blood and retreated backward at top speed without hesitation. I'm blind! How can I stay near this devious Conical Hat Guest?

But as he retreated, an incredibly dense CRACKLING sound suddenly erupted by his ears!

Immediately following this, he felt excruciating pain and scorching heat all over his body. It seemed that in that single moment, countless terrifying bolts of lightning had simultaneously struck his head, face, neck, chest, abdomen, and groin...

His abundant Perfect Qi Blood dissipated at a terrifyingly rapid speed, gushing out uncontrollably!

In just a single breath, all the Qi Blood within Zhang Yihu's body was completely exhausted.

Then, he died.

He was reduced to a charred human figure, emitting a sickeningly burnt odor.

Under the assault of twenty-four simultaneous blasts from Lin Xuankong's Divine Thunder Illusion Technique, the fact that Zhang Yihu's Qi Blood could sustain him for even a breath was already incredible, a testament to his early-stage Third Layer Realm!

Third Layer Martial Cultivators possessed acute senses. Although Zhao Dalong and Qian Han didn't witness Zhang Yihu's death, the countless sounds of Divine Thunder ravaging a human body reaching their ears allowed them to quickly deduce his fate.

These two highly respected figures within the Black Tiger Gang, the strongest among the many stewards, felt their hearts pounding like drums. If they hadn't heard it themselves, they would scarcely believe that an early-stage Third Layer Martial Cultivator could only last a single breath against the Conical Hat Guest! An early-stage Third Layer Martial Cultivator! Not some nobody! Every Martial Cultivator who reached the Third Layer was exceptionally talented, an expert forged through nearly twenty years of arduous cultivation! Yet he died so easily—easier than cracking a melon seed!

"Retreat!" Zhao Dalong roared.

"Scatter!" Qian Han also yelled.

Just moments ago, the two esteemed Black Tiger Gang Stewards had been brimming with confidence, certain of killing the Conical Hat Guest. Now, they instantly decided to flee.

Meanwhile, Zhang Wu lay prostrate on the ground, severely injured, blinded, and unable to move...

Immediately after, Zhao Dalong and Qian Han simultaneously surged all their Qi Blood, unleashing their most ferocious power as they leaped skyward!

Their strength was indeed formidable, their reactions and decisiveness far surpassing ordinary Martial Cultivators. The force they exerted was truly ferocious; the ground beneath them caved in, forming large depressions.

Especially Zhao Dalong, at the mid-grade of the Third Layer, whose explosive power was terrifying. As he leaped, he stomped a three-foot-deep crater into the ground, and the entire Zhang Residence shook violently, as if a minor earthquake had struck!

Unfortunately, despite their desperate efforts, neither of them managed to break through the roof and escape the Zhang Residence.

Because, with lightning-fast speed, the vines of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl had already entangled both of them!

Zhao Dalong and Qian Han, at the mid-grade and early stage of the Third Layer respectively, leaped with frantic power, causing the Black Demon Vines unleashed by the Twin Vine Demon Pearl to stretch taut... but ultimately, they remained grounded!

Chapter 77: Aurora Shining Heaven Unleashes Divine Might, Cutting Down Three Layers with Irresistible Force_2

The two men dragged back to the ground, terrified, frantically attacked the Black Demon Vines coiling towards their abdomens and chests with their sharp Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claws. However, Lin Xuankong was now at the Third Layer, nearing mid-grade. The Demon Vines he wielded had long surpassed those Gu Beicheng had once easily severed.

These Black Demon Vines were now incredibly tough, their entangling power terrifying. Even Zhao Dalong could only suppress the vines' spread with a measure of ease, while Qian Han, at the early stage of the Third Layer, had to exert all his strength just to barely slow their advance...

CRACKLE... CRACKLE... CRACKLE...

The two blind men suddenly heard it again—the sound of lightning that had just slain Steward Zhang Yihu. That death-knell sound of lightning rang out once more!

Zhao Dalong's expression changed drastically. His left hand, wielding the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw, suppressed the Demon Vines. Simultaneously, his right hand swung the Profound Iron Scale Whip with all his might, attempting to block the Conical Hat Guest's approach. Meanwhile, Qian Han, his face already ulcerated by the Aurora Heaven-Brightening Technique, contorted into an ugly and bizarre expression of despair. He pushed his Qi Blood to its absolute limit, desperately trying to shield his entire body.

One breath later, his Qi Blood completely depleted by the Divine Thunder, Qian Han's body stiffened and collapsed to one side.

The moment his Qi Blood was exhausted, every organ, every inch of skin and flesh in his body, turned to charcoal under the ravages of the terrifying Divine Thunder. Even his bodily waste was not spared.

Zhao Dalong, pinned in place by the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, frantically swung his Profound Iron Scale Whip. Countless stone slabs on the ground shattered and flew in all directions, reducing the area around him to ruins.

However, though Zhao Dalong's whip technique seemed overwhelmingly powerful, his voice betrayed panic and disbelief, "Steward Qian? Qian Han? Say something!"

The only answer was the sound of something dry shattering as it hit the ground.

Zhao Dalong swallowed hard. He could hardly believe what he had heard. In the span of two breaths, two Third-Layer Stewards had perished? Vice Hall Master Li claimed the Conical Hat Guest had Second-Layer Cultivation? Damn his Second-Layer Cultivation! Even if it were Third-Layer Perfection, they couldn't have killed two Third-Layer cultivators so swiftly. Unless it was a Fourth-Layer Martial Cultivator with formidable Martial Skills! Could the Conical Hat Guest actually be a Fourth-Layer Martial Cultivator? Those damned Stewards who investigated the scene swore that the force the Conical Hat Guest used to break the wall was undoubtedly Second Layer! Damn it, they've gotten me killed!

Zhao Dalong frantically swung the Profound Iron White Whip in his right hand, trying to keep the Conical Hat Guest at bay. But he soon realized that the deathly CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE... of thunder was growing louder again.

Zhao Dalong's expression froze.

He suddenly flicked the Profound Iron Soft Whip in his hand. Instantly, the white Forehead Scales composing the Profound Iron Scale Whip mobilized, enveloping his arms and torso, leaving only his legs and head exposed. This Profound Iron Whip truly lived up to its reputation as one of the renowned Exorcism Treasures of the Black Tiger Gang's Hill City Hall. It was both offensive and defensive, even surpassing Ma Jiang's Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand in power.

Yet, even with his torso protected by the Exorcism Equipment, Zhao Dalong's heart remained heavy. He knew very well that if his eyes hadn't been blinded by the Conical Hat Guest's despicable Abnormal Technique, he could have used such powerful protection to evade the attacks. Now, blinded and panicked, how could he possibly mount a comprehensive defense?

Gritting his teeth, he suddenly reached into his waist pouch and clutched a black jade stone in his left hand.

"Conical Hat Guest, this Black Soul Wondrous Jade in my hand is comparable in value to a full set of Exorcism Armor and the Twin Vine Demon Pearl. Even the Royal Family of the Great Xia Dynasty greatly values this jade! If you spare me, this invaluable Black Soul Wondrous Jade will be yours. Otherwise, I will immediately destroy this jade that countless Martial Cultivators covet!"

After speaking, he listened intently, only to realize with horror that the CRACKLE...CRACKLE... of thunder was drawing nearer.

"Damn it! I am the son of Hall Master Zhao Renxiong of the Hill City Branch! You can't kill me!" Zhao Dalong roared, his face twitching uncontrollably.

The CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE... sound was already behind him.

Zhao Dalong clenched his jaw, channeling all his strength into his left hand, intending to crush the jade stone...

Just then, he suddenly felt his left arm go rigid, as if ensnared by something that spread with incredible speed. It even bound his fingers tightly, making it impossible to exert any force. That strange substance spread many times faster than the Demon Vines!

In the next moment, Zhao Dalong felt an excruciating burning sensation engulf his entire body.

Two breaths later, his Qi Blood exhausted and his body reduced to charcoal, Zhao Dalong collapsed.

Lin Xuankong stood to one side, gazing coldly at Zhao Dalong's corpse. This Zhao Dalong nearly killed Ma Jiang yesterday... So what if he's the Hall Master's son? Can one life be worth ten?

Averting his gaze, he accepted the black jade stone that the Manluo Demon Grass coiled over to him. The Black Soul Wondrous Jade... is it really that precious?

In the corner of the hall, the blind Zhang Wu heard the voice, and his ulcerated face contorted violently. Though gravely injured, he could hardly believe it. The two strongest Stewards of the Black Tiger Gang, along with Hall Master Zhao's son, Zhao Dalong, had all perished at the hands of the Conical Hat Guest in mere moments!

They had died without any chance to fight back! Died like three insignificant ants! Died just like those ordinary people he himself had casually crushed to death!

The footsteps of the Conical Hat Guest drew nearer.

Overwhelmed by extreme fear, Zhang Wu began to descend into madness. "You're doomed! You're doomed! Zhao Dalong's father is the Hall Master of the Hill City Branch! For killing Zhao Dalong, you'll never escape the Black Tiger Gang's Dark Tiger Pursuit Order! Conical Hat Guest, you're fucking doomed!"

"Oh?" Lin Xuankong frowned, looking at the terrified and frenzied Zhang Wu. Memories of past events surfaced in his mind.

CRACKLE...CRACKLE...

Zhang Wu's body stiffened and was instantly reduced to a piece of charcoal.

Lin Xuankong, clutching that jade bottle, walked towards the back of the hall.

He was somewhat surprised. He had thought that two Early Stage cultivators and one Mid-grade Third Layer cultivator would put up a much stronger fight, at least enough to force him to use the Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder Divine Technique... However, the Divine Thunder Illusion Technique, fueled

by twenty-four Divine Thunder Roots, had an overwhelmingly lethal effect on Martial Cultivators, far exceeding his prior expectations! The strongest among the three, Zhao Dalong, had only managed to resist for two breaths! The Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder Divine Technique, powerful but with high energy consumption, never even had a chance to be used! However, the Aurora Heaven-Brightening Technique, an auxiliary Combat Skill that caused instant blindness and desiccation of the eyes, had proven to be incredibly effective. He was extremely satisfied with this result!

Moments later, Lin Xuankong finished dealing with the Black Tiger Gang members who had been aiding Zhang Residence. He then collected all the silver and medicinal materials from the estate. Finally, standing in the center of the hall, he activated the Divine Thunder Illusion Technique and slammed his palm fiercely onto the ground.

CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE...CRACKLE...

Countless bolts of lightning shot out in all directions. The sandalwood tables and chairs, along with the wooden beams and pillars, instantly burst into flames. Metal objects melted into pools of boiling liquid that flowed everywhere.

After a few breaths, the ornately decorated main hall of Zhang Residence had transformed into a molten wasteland. Raging fires erupted in every corner of the Zhang Residence.

Lin Xuankong leaped out, vanishing into the nearby streets and alleys.

The Divine Thunder Illusion Technique truly was a superb Thunder Technique for arson and demolition, and even better as a Martial Dao method for erasing all traces of a battle!

「Half a Cup of Tea Time later,」

Lin Xuankong was already seated in the outer room of his wooden building.

Lii Xiaolan lit an oil lamp and joined him in sorting through the considerable haul from tonight's raid.

"This huge pile of silver and Gold Sycees... it must be at least ten thousand taels of silver!" Lii Xiaolan exclaimed, joyfully tallying their gains.

Lin Xuankong replied, "We had to gather everything hastily to avoid encountering a large number of Black Tiger Gang experts coming as reinforcements, so I didn't have time to count it properly. We'll tally it carefully in a bit. It should be at least ten thousand taels of silver, though."

He placed the Profound Iron Whip from his waist on the table, then took the jade stone out from his robes. We also acquired a Profound Iron Whip and this jade stone. It's supposedly the Black Soul Wondrous Jade, but is it genuine? A Black Soul Wondrous Jade, comparable in value to Exorcism Armor and a Demon Pearl? What exactly are its effects? Even the Royal Family of the Great Xia Dynasty supposedly places great importance on it?

Chapter 78: The Black Tiger Gang Trembles, The Mysterious Black Soul Wondrous Jade

Qingshui Street Entrance, ruins—the former Zhang Residence!

Thousands of Black Tiger Gang members, each holding a torch, stood around the ruins. The torches illuminated the nearby streets and alleys, making them as bright as day. The citizens in the surrounding residential streets had long been awakened by the commotion. However, not a single person dared to come out and watch. They all peeked through the cracks in their windows before shrinking back into their beds, trembling with their wives and children.

Every Black Tiger Gang member around the ruins had drawn their weapons. These weapons glinted menacingly in the torchlight, thousands of cold points of light flashing around the ruins. However, if any citizen dared to observe closely, they would find that the Black Tiger Gang members, usually so rampant in Great Marsh Prefecture, now had faces filled with apprehension, and their eyes betrayed a hint of fear, even as they gripped their sharp long knives.

It wasn't just the ordinary gang members who felt a chill in their hearts, fear etched on their faces. The nearly two hundred Leaders of the Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall were also terrified. This fear extended to the dozens of Deputy Stewards and even the more than ten high-ranking Stewards of the Great Marsh Hall; a trace of dread was evident in all their eyes. Through interrogating neighbors near the Zhang Residence, they had learned a crucial fact. A short while ago, the person who fought for a brief period of a little over ten breaths at the Zhang Residence, reducing it to ruins, was dressed in black, wore a conical hat, and a Ghost Face Mask. It was the Conical Hat Guest!

Thus, they now understood. The Conical Hat Guest, whom they had initially believed to possess only Second-Layer Cultivation, actually had terrifying strength. Three Third-Layer Stewards (including Zhao

Dalong, the Black Tiger Gang's reputed genius at the Mid-grade Third Layer), one Deputy Steward, and dozens of elite gang members had all perished within a mere ten breaths.

Thinking back to a few hours before, when they were still planning to search for the Conical Hat Guest in groups, full of vigor...

Search, my foot! Against such a ruthless and fierce Conical Hat Guest, if they fell into his hands, they wouldn't even have the chance to be captured alive!

Realizing this, how could they not be terrified!

At this moment, every member of the Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall tightly gripped the knife in their hand. They looked formidable, but the hair on their bodies stood on end from sheer terror.

At the center of the ruins, Vice Hall Master Liy Ruofeng stood nine feet tall, his eyes icy. The Jade Gourd in his hand faintly glimmered. He glanced at the charred ground beneath his feet and spoke in a deep voice to the several Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards beside him, "Qian Liu, Ma Sandao, didn't you confidently assert that the Conical Hat Guest was around Mid-grade Second-Layer Cultivation, at most Late Stage Second-Layer?"

Qian Liu, a Steward of the Black Tiger Gang at Second-Layer Perfection, turned pale. He knelt on the ground with a THUD and said, trembling, "I misjudged, leading to Steward Zhao's death. I am willing to bear all punishment; I only beg the Vice Hall Master to spare my family, the old and young!"

Steward Ma Sandao's expression changed dramatically. His Qi Blood roiled as he frantically retreated. However, Ma Sandao had retreated little more than twenty zhang when a pitch-black shadow suddenly appeared on the ground. Like an inseparable shadow, it caught up to Ma Sandao and merged with his own shadow. Then, the eerie shadow wriggled, extending pitch-black hands from beneath the ground to grab Ma Sandao's legs.

Liy Ruofeng, activating the Jade Gourd in his hand, watched Ma Sandao expressionlessly from afar. The eerie black shadow on the ground ignored Ma Sandao's attacks as it grasped his legs. Its pitch-black arms slowly stretched and extended, as if intending to tear Ma Sandao in two. After attacking for a moment, Ma Sandao suddenly let out a horrifying scream and frantically circulated his Qi Blood to resist...

Half a breath later, Ma Sandao, torn into pieces by the eerie shadow, lay scattered all over the ground.

Liy Ruofeng then said in a deep voice, "Ma Sandao's misjudgment caused the deaths of three Stewards. Furthermore, he attempted to flee from his crime. For this, his entire family shall be exterminated as a warning!"

Witnessing this, the thousands of Black Tiger Gang members stared at the eerie shadow. They shivered inwardly, their faces deathly pale.

A few Stewards secretly shook their heads. To think Ma Sandao actually attempted to flee right in front of Vice Hall Master Li—what wishful thinking!

Liy Ruofeng no longer paid attention to the crowd and strode towards one side of the ruins.

At this moment, a sense of deep dread also filled the heart of this Vice Hall Master of the Black Tiger Gang Great Marsh Hall.

Zhao Dalong was Hall Master Zhao Renxiong's most prized descendant. Zhao Renxiong's Martial Arts Cultivation was far beyond what he himself could ever hope to achieve... When Zhao Renxiong arrived at the Great Marsh Hall tomorrow, he would likely turn the entire Great Marsh Prefecture upside down!

The Grand Chief Steward Sima Liuyun, following beside Liy Ruofeng, said in a low voice, "Vice Hall Master, Zhao Dalong himself volunteered for the mission to attack Ma Jiang and to lie in wait for the Conical Hat Guest. All the Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards can testify to this. As for the matter of the Conical Hat Guest, it was indeed Ma Sandao's erroneous judgment... Ma Sandao's head should somewhat appease Hall Master Zhao's resentment. After all, the one who killed Zhao Dalong was the Conical Hat Guest!"

Liy Ruofeng sneered. "What do you know? It's not just that Zhao Dalong lost his life... Zhao Renxiong gave him his Black Soul Wondrous Jade!

"Our Black Tiger Gang Leader spent a hundred years, along with countless efforts and resources, to refine only fourteen Black Soul Wondrous Jades.

"Eight were offered as tribute to the Royal Family, leaving six with the gang. One of those six was exchanged for a set of Nine-Scaly Armor, so only five of these priceless jades remained!

"Now, due to Zhao Dalong's death, one has been effectively gifted to the Conical Hat Guest. How could Zhao Renxiong possibly resign himself to that?"

Sima Liuyun's expression changed. "Hall Master Zhao's Black Soul Wondrous Jade was on Zhao Dalong? But... Zhao Dalong didn't use it when he attacked Ma Jiang!"

Chapter 79: he Black Tiger Gang Trembles, The Mysterious Black Soul Wondrous Jade_2

Liy Ruofeng frowned. "The Black Soul Wondrous Jade is exceptionally miraculous. Without proper preparation, how can it be easily activated?"

"This time, my arrangement was a mistake, causing our gang to lose a genius and a precious jade. Tomorrow, when I meet with the Gang Leader and Hall Master Zhao, I will take responsibility. I will participate in the Demon Slaying Conference, which Zhao Dalong should have attended. In this way, Zhao Renxiong's anger should no longer be directed at the Great Marsh Hall!"

Sima Liuyun's brows furrowed. How could he have imagined that because of a Conical Hat Guest, even Vice Hall Master Liy Ruofeng would have to be held accountable...

"Vice Hall Master, you want to participate in the Demon Slaying Conference? In the Demon-Suppressing Valley, your cultivation will be suppressed to Tier Three. Facing other experts and those Tier Three demons at that time..."

Liy Ruofeng replied coldly, "Before participating in the Demon Slaying Conference, I will borrow the Hall Master's Nine-Scaly Armor. With a complete set of Exorcism Armor and the Black Soul Wondrous Jade, and teaming up with Ruo Hong of the Late-Stage Tier Three and several Stewards, how could we fear others?"

Nine-Scaly Armor! Sima Liuyun's eyes lit up, and he immediately cupped his hands and said, "Then I wish Vice Hall Master success in taking the lead at the Demon Slaying Conference!"

Liy Jiu City glanced around. "The Conical Hat Guest's strikes are vicious, his strength extraordinary. According to the recent interrogation, the disturbances caused by the Conical Hat Guest lasted no more than ten breaths. In less than ten breaths, he managed to kill Zhao Dalong, Qian Han, Zhang Yihu, and Zhang Wu, leaving not even a bone. Even with the aid of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, such prowess... Now, the thousands of Gang Members in our Great Marsh Hall are probably scared out of their wits, and no one will dare to investigate the Conical Hat Guest's whereabouts openly! Let's put aside the matter of investigating the Conical Hat Guest for now. When Zhao Renxiong and the Gang Leader arrive tomorrow, we will discuss other strategies!"

After Liy Ruofeng finished speaking, he slowly rotated the Jade Gourd in his hand and sighed. At this moment, even as a Late-Stage Fourth Layer Vice Hall Master, he had no idea of the Conical Hat Guest's true cultivation level! As for those Gang Members, they must be scared stiff! It's just a pity about that priceless Black Soul Wondrous Jade. Who knows when it will be retrieved for the Black Tiger Gang!

「Yin Talisman Sect Great Marsh Branch, General Manager's Tower.」

Jiang Yuran, dressed in a moon-white Daoist Robe, along with three Grand Chief Stewards and eight Stewards, looked towards Grand Chief Steward Gao Yunchao who had summoned them. Jiang Yuran frowned. "What's the urgent matter?"

Gao Yunchao cupped his hands and said, "Zhao Dalong is dead!"

"Zhao Dalong is dead?" Jiang Yuran's delicate face was filled with amazement. She stared at Gao Yunchao, the Steward in charge of the Dark Hall. "I only instructed you to dispatch people to interfere with the Black Tiger Gang's transportation line, and you actually killed Zhao Dalong?"

Xu Bei, sitting to one side, showed a look of surprise. Zhao Dalong? Zhao Dalong, who wielded the Profound Iron Whip, reached Mid-grade Tier Three in his twenties, with talent comparable to Steward Zhao Yufei. Such a genius, stronger than me, was so easily killed by a few experts from the Dark Hall sent by Grand Chief Steward Gao. When did the Yin Talisman Sect's Dark Hall experts become so formidable?

Hu Shuo's red face showed worry. "Zhao Dalong is said to be a genius of the younger generation in the Black Tiger Gang and Zhao Renxiong's son... Killing him might turn the entire Great Marsh Prefecture upside down! Grand Chief Steward Gao, did the Dark Hall's experts leave any traces?"

Just as Gao Yunchao was about to explain, Ma Jiang suddenly laughed. "Hahaha, well killed, Grand Chief Steward Gao! Tonight, I'll treat you to Qianqi Tower. Pick any headliner you want, or have several at the same time!"

Jiang Yuran: ...

Zhao Yufei: ...

All the Stewards and Grand Chief Stewards: ...

Gao Yunchao gave Ma Jiang a speechless look and shook his head slightly. "It wasn't me who killed him. According to the spy's report, it was likely the Conical Hat Guest. Moreover, he killed Zhao Dalong, Qian Han, and Zhang Yihu within ten breaths!"

Hu Shuo, with his red face, immediately stood up in surprise. "What? The Qi Blood of a Tier Three expert has already reached Perfection. To kill a Tier Three expert without exchanging one or two hundred moves to deplete their Qi Blood is nearly impossible! Killing three Tier Three experts within ten breaths—could it be that the Conical Hat Guest is a Tier Four expert?"

Grand Chief Steward Wu Liangye remarked with some feeling, "Instantly killing three Tier Three experts... A Tier Four expert, with the addition of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, could indeed accomplish this! Originally, I thought of the Conical Hat Guest as a mere troublemaker. Turns out, he is an expert hidden in the shadows, with such formidable strength! Fortunately, this Conical Hat Guest seems to be at odds with the Black Tiger Gang. Otherwise..."

A look passed through the eyes of everyone present. The Conical Hat Guest being a Tier Four expert, combined with the Twin Vine Demon Pearl... This fearsome combination! Among those present, apart from Late-Stage Fourth Layer experts Wu Liangye, Gao Yunchao, and Chief Steward Jiang, anyone facing the Conical Hat Guest alone would have no chance and would be instantly killed.

Jiang Yuran suddenly smiled brightly and stood up. "Hehe, very good, well done to the Conical Hat Guest! Tomorrow, spread the word that in three days, I will celebrate my birthday with a grand banquet!"

Zhao Yufei's cold eyes looked at Jiang Yuran. "Chief Steward, isn't your birthday in December?"

"I'm happy, can't I celebrate six months early?"

Zhao Yufei: ...

This Chief Steward Jiang... She shook her head helplessly but couldn't help recalling her previous plan to capture the Conical Hat Guest alive, which now made her heart shiver slightly.

"Black Soul Wondrous Jade?" Lii Xiaolan asked, pleasantly surprised as she took the jade. She then examined it carefully for a good while before exclaiming, "It truly is the Black Tiger Gang's Black Soul Wondrous Jade, the foremost treasure of Great Marsh!

"It's said that the old Black Tiger Gang Leader obtained the Jade Refining Technique from an eccentric in the northern Rakshasa Kingdom, and he spends countless resources yearly to refine precious jade... This Black Soul Wondrous Jade must be nurtured with the Qi Blood of Martial Cultivators using the Black Tiger Gang's unique technique. Once the jade is nurtured, it can produce a unique shadow double for its cultivator. Each shadow is different, but all possess the same speed and explosive power as the Martial Cultivator. They fear no harm and know only attack! A Martial Cultivator with such a Miracle Jade essentially has a shadow double with nearly equal strength!

"I followed the young lady to the officials' trade fair and saw such a jade once. Just one Black Soul Wondrous Jade was exchanged for the then most famous Nine-Scaly Exorcism Armor! The young lady missed the chance to acquire that Miracle Jade and, in her anger, drank several flagons of strong liquor when she got home. She even drunkenly insisted that I share a bed with her!"

Lin Xuankong, hearing this, became somewhat delighted. "Such a miraculous jade!"

But soon, he asked in puzzlement, "If both create extraordinary powers, why is the Demon Pearl valued higher than the Miracle Jade?"

Lii Xiaolan laughed. "Demon Pearls are infinitely miraculous. For example, your Twin Vine Demon Pearl was condensed from a Tier Two Demon Vine. So when you were at the First Layer and Second Layer, it could only summon Tier Two Black Demon Vines, easily controlling Tier Two Martial Cultivators! But

now that you are at the Third Layer of Transcendence, with more refined Qi Blood, it can summon Tier Three Demon Vines, significantly increasing control and killing power. When you reach the Fourth Layer, it will summon Fourth Layer Demon Vines!

"Demon Pearls are infinitely wondrous. They increase in power with your strength and can summon diverse demons. However, the Black Soul Wondrous Jade refined by the Black Tiger Gang Leader has a limit: it can only summon shadow doubles with strength up to the Sixth Layer of Transcendence. Of course, a cultivator at the Sixth Layer of Transcendence is already a top figure in a county, capable of establishing a sect. They are elite figures. Even the Great Marsh Prefect, who oversees millions of citizens in hundreds of cities, possesses this level of cultivation!

"To stronger Martial Cultivators, the Demon Pearl is naturally more valuable. For Martial Cultivators at the Sixth Layer of Transcendence and below, the difference in effect between Demon Pearls and Miracle Jades is not significant; both are invaluable treasures. The key is that Demon Pearls are rare and cannot be stably produced. Consequently, the Black Soul Wondrous Jade, which the old Black Tiger Gang Leader can refine, has become a tribute item. It is highly valued by the Great Xia Royal Family and used as protective treasures for royal descendants!"

Lin Xuankong, upon hearing this, couldn't help but joyfully caress the Black Soul Wondrous Jade Lii Xiaolan handed back, his eyes full of delight.

Lii Xiaolan then thought of something and frowned. "The Black Soul Wondrous Jade is incredibly precious. How did a Deputy Steward like Zhang Wu, who is only Early-Stage Tier Two, acquire such a Miracle Jade?"

Lin Xuankong casually replied, "It wasn't Zhang Wu's. It belonged to a Black Tiger Gang Steward named Zhao Dalong!"

Lii Xiaolan's expression changed upon hearing this, and she grabbed his hand. "Zhao Dalong? Zhao Dalong with the Profound Iron Whip? The son of the Black Tiger Gang's Hill City Hall Master Zhao Renxiong? You killed him?"

"Yes!"

Lii Xiaolan's delicate face changed slightly. "Oh no, this is serious!"

Chapter 80: The Ruyi Profound Gold Rod, Significant Improvement in Strength

Lin Xuankong's heart skipped a beat when Lii Xiaolan grabbed his right hand. He grasped her small hand in return. "What's happened? Tell me everything, slowly."

Lii Xiaolan glared at him, trying to pull her hand away. However, she suddenly remembered that Lin Xuankong had killed Zhao Dalong and was now in great danger. Her heart softened, and she let him hold her hand.

After a moment of silence, she looked worried and sighed softly. "Zhao Renxiong is the strongest under the Black Tiger Gang Leader, with a late-stage Fifth Layer cultivation. For him, killing Fourth Layer experts, let alone Third Layer ones, is as easy as eating pie! The forces and influence he commands are enough to turn the entire Great Marsh Prefecture upside down!"

"You killed Zhao Dalong. Zhao Renxiong will never rest until he finds you!"

Lin Xuankong frowned slightly. "The Zhang Residence is now in ruins. Zhao Renxiong couldn't even find Zhao Dalong's ashes. In such circumstances, how could he possibly find any clues?"

Lii Xiaolan frowned, pondering for a moment. "Normally, with no trace left, the Black Tiger Gang shouldn't be able to find you. What I'm afraid of is that there might be some oversight. After all, secrets always get out. Given enough time, he might uncover something! No, I have to think of a way..."

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong suddenly laughed. "Given enough time? Who says we need that much time? In a few months, I could very well reach Zhao Renxiong's late-stage Fifth Layer cultivation!"

Lii Xiaolan was stunned by his words and couldn't help but stare at Lin Xuankong. Although his face was weathered and his hair white, his eyes were resolute, radiating confidence and a heroic spirit!

After a moment of stunned silence, Lii Xiaolan squeezed Lin Xuankong's large hand in return. "Alright, I will wait and see when my dear husband can advance to the Fifth Layer. By then, let all the Martial Cultivators of Great Marsh Prefecture know that the Cyan-Eyed Tiger Zhao Renxiong, who has always terrorized the hundred cities of Great Marsh Prefecture, might not be your match!"

Lin Xuankong laughed. "If your husband is that formidable, what reward will my Young Lady give me then?"

Lii Xiaolan shot him a glare. "What reward? Let's hurry up and count our spoils!"

Under the red candlelight, the two of them huddled together, carefully counting their gains. Unlike usual, the great threat posed by Zhao Renxiong had paradoxically brought them closer...

A moment later, they finished counting. The amount of Gold plundered from the Zhang Residence was considerable. Including the silver and Lin Xuankong's original silver taels, it amounted to nearly three thousand taels of Gold.

Additionally, there were over two hundred portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup ingredients, worth over ten thousand taels of silver.

Lin Xuankong looked at these gains, a hint of hope in his eyes. With so much, even if there's competition in three days, buying three hundred Forehead Scales shouldn't be a problem. After all, the most expensive, rarest, and hardest-to-find material for crafting Exorcism Armor is actually the seldom-seen Demon People's Essence... Forehead Scales, on the other hand, aren't too expensive because they can be obtained from Low-tier Marsh Python People. Normally, forty silver taels per piece is already quite steep!

After finishing the count, Lii Xiaolan comfortably stretched her slender waist. "With so much silver, after buying the Forehead Scales, the remainder will be enough to cover the refining costs. I wonder what kind of Exorcism Armor you plan to craft? The Black Tiger Gang's most famous Exorcism Equipment includes the Nine-Scaly Armor, which is shaped like a Nine-Scaled Long Saber; the Snake Spine Armor; and you already obtained their Profound Iron Whip. The Yin Talisman Sect's famous Battle Armors include the versatile Cyan Rainbow Battle Armor. Zhao Yufei has a set of Silver Hook Armor, and Xu Bei possesses the Profound Silver Scalp Sword!"

Lin Xuankong thought for a moment, then smiled. "An inch longer, an inch stronger! I plan to craft a Profound Iron Rod that can extend several zhang. When facing an opponent, I'll just swing the rod and smash them—simple and satisfying!" As he said this, he couldn't help but think of the mythical Great Sage Equal to Heaven from his past life, who had wreaked havoc in the Lingxiao Palace. With anticipation in his eyes, he continued, "Hmm, let's call this design the Ruyi Golden Cudgel, and the armor form will be the Ruyi Battle Armor!"

Lii Xiaolan, who was envisioning the design of the future Exorcism Armor, nodded when she heard Lin Xuankong's idea of crafting an Iron Rod. "Ruyi Golden Cudgel, Ruyi Battle Armor... those are pretty good names!"

A smile touched Lin Xuankong's lips. Pretty good? It's more than just pretty good! If I really craft a Ruyi Golden Cudgel weighing over ten thousand pounds and can actually wield it... so what if a Second Layer Perfection defense is incredibly tough? Everything has its limits. A single strike would turn them into meat paste! According to the calculation of the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand with two hundred Forehead Scales and three hundred pounds, a whole set of Exorcism Armor with eight hundred Forehead Scales should weigh around twelve hundred pounds. Add some incredibly heavy Profound Iron, and it would easily be sixteen or seventeen hundred pounds... Wielding an Iron Rod weighing nearly two thousand pounds would be terrifyingly powerful. I could probably take out a late-stage Second Layer 'kid' with a single strike! Using such an Iron Rod, wreathed in twenty-four Divine Thunders—my combat power would be absolutely off the charts!

While Lin Xuankong was lost in these thoughts, Lii Xiaolan stood up and headed upstairs. "Once we get the Forehead Scales in three days, we can start forging it. I'm eager to see just how powerful your Iron Rod will be then.

"By the way, there's one more thing. Nurturing the Black Soul Wondrous Jade requires a special Heart Method from the Black Tiger Gang. That Heart Method is probably only accessible to their Gang Members who are at the Grand Steward Level, around the early Fourth Layer!

"However, the Black Tiger Gang will definitely be on high alert these days. If Zhao Renxiong comes looking, it will be even more troublesome. You should lay low for a while; I'll help you figure something out!"

Lin Xuankong shook his head. "I've been cultivating diligently. By the time I reach Third Layer Perfection or the early Fourth Layer, the heat will probably have died down. Then I can just pick some nefarious Black Tiger Gang Grand Chief Steward, raid his home, and that'll be that!"

Lii Xiaolan paused, looking at Lin Xuankong with a hint of helplessness in her beautiful eyes. Others cultivate for at least ten years to advance a single Realm. Yet this husband of mine improves daily, advances monthly. Cultivation is easier for him than an old man slipping into a warm bed. When I first married him, he seemed old and frail, so pitiable that I couldn't bring myself to leave him immediately. I

never imagined that a moment of soft-heartedness would lead me to find such a monstrously talented husband!

「Three days later.」

Lin Xuankong stood in his now extremely spacious backyard. After he had turned their original backyard into ruins, he and Lii Xiaolan had discussed moving to a larger residence. However, Lii Xiaolan suggested instead that he buy up the twenty-odd neighboring commoners' houses to the east, west, and north. Then, they demolished some of the surrounding wooden buildings to create an expansive, flat courtyard for his training. They also raised the courtyard walls to about three zhang and added some rockeries, making the whole place quite secluded.

Purchasing the wooden buildings, renovating the bluestone courtyard, and raising the walls had cost several hundred silver taels in total. For ordinary people, this was a sum they couldn't save in ten lifetimes. But for the immensely wealthy Lin Xuankong, such an expense was negligible.

After a session of practicing the Pine Skill in the backyard, Lin Xuankong circulated his Qi Blood and forcefully stamped his foot on the ground. Instantly, bricks and stones scattered as he punched a pit over four feet deep and nearly a zhang wide into the solid bluestone. Countless cracks spiderwebbed outwards, and the entire backyard trembled violently.

Sensing his current terrifying explosive power, he felt the muscles of his thighs and calves—which now nearly doubled in thickness when he exerted force—and nodded slightly in satisfaction.

He looked at the Life Plate in his Brain Mansion.

[Realm: Mid-grade Third Layer Transcendence]

[Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Entering the Hall 107/300]

Three days ago, when I fought Zhao Dalong, he stamped a pit over three feet deep, nearly four feet, into the ground. His might was unparalleled. Although I could have easily killed him then, I was far from capable of such physical explosive power. Now that I've broken through to the Mid-grade Third Layer, my explosive power has increased severalfold again. I can achieve that with ease now! Only a select few,

like Xu Bei and Steward Hu Shuo, hold high positions among the thousands of members in the Yin Talisman Sect. Despite being high-level combatants of the sect, they are merely at the Mid-grade Third Layer! Unknowingly, I, a mere pancake vendor, have already reached such a Realm! And this is just for now; how could I be content to remain at their level? I'm just one step away. In twenty-odd days at most, I can advance to the Late Stage Third Layer! By then, setting aside my ability to easily crush Same Tier combatants, even if we're just comparing Cultivation Realms, I will be among the absolute top tier of the myriad talents participating in the Demon Slaying Conference! Once I reach the Late Stage or Perfection, and my strength skyrockets again, I can find a Black Tiger Gang Grand Chief Steward and see if I can obtain their Heart Method for nurturing the Black Soul Wondrous Jade! I wonder what kind of shadow clone will appear when I activate the Black Soul Wondrous Jade? My Young Lady said that the shadow clones created by the Black Soul Wondrous Jade each have unique characteristics. What unique characteristic will mine possess? Of course, what I'm most eagerly anticipating right now, what's almost within my grasp, is my Ruyi Golden Armor and Golden Cudgel! Once I get the Forehead Scales tonight and successfully forge it, if I were to wield it against someone like Zhao Dalong at the Mid-grade Third Layer... even without using the Soul-Extinction Celestial Thunder Divine Technique, it wouldn't take more than two breaths. The Demon Vine would restrain him, and a few blows from the cudgel would instantly turn him into Zhao Bianlong! Best of all, this Ruyi Exorcism Armor not only boosts combat power but also provides terrifying defense and easily dispels Demon Qi!