SPIRIT REALM

BOOK 01

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Spirit Realm

(灵域)

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Synopsis

Thirty thousand years ago, the Heaven Fighting Race who called themselves “Gods” invaded the Spirit Realm. Hundreds of races rose up in resistance, but ultimately suffered a crushing defeat. The Human Race was the first to concede, and the rest of the Hundred Races soon followed in succession.

During the subsequent ten thousand years, all of the races were enslaved by the Heaven Fighting Race. They were cruelly treated, and lived beneath the shadow of terror.

The Heaven Fighting Race’s march of conquest did not stop there. With the Spirit Realm as the starting point, they invaded other secret dimensions, and spread war to all corners of existence. After greatly exhausting their combat strength, they were finally defeated by the Hundred Races who took advantage of this opportunity. With no other choice, they fled to the starry skies outside the realm.

Thirty thousand years later, in an era where the Heaven Fighting Race has already faded to become ancient legend, an amnesiac youth possessing the Heaven Fighting Race’s bloodline is being fostered in an insignificant household. Whilst struggling to live on, he silently awaits the day of the bloodline’s awakening.

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First Edition: October 2016

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Chapter 1: Small Town Youth

Ling Town.

Early morning. Young Qin Lie blankly got out of bed as the sky had just begun to brighten. After a simple freshening up, he walked directly toward Ling Dining Hall.

The rough linen attired Qin Lie had a slim figure and could be considered delicate. However, his eyes were vacant, without any trace of vigor, causing others to feel as though he had lost his soul.

Along the way, many of Ling Town's young martial practitioners had also woke up early. Upon seeing young Qin Lie, many of them smiled kindly.

"Good morning Qin Lie!"

Seeing Qin Lie enter, Ling Feng grinned brightly, calling out to him as he waved.

Unfortunately, it seemed as though Qin Lie was not able to hear other people's voices; his expression was still as blank as before. He passed by Ling Feng without ceasing his footsteps, and continued onward.

"Big Brother Feng, why do you bother talking to a fool? You obviously know that he can't respond, yet you always greet him everyday in the morning." A bright yellow attired, well endowed

sixteen year old Ling Ying casually commented as she looked at Qin Lie with contempt. She looked rather dainty, and her soft chest that provoked fanciful thoughts stood tall.

After hearing what Ling Ying had said, the expressions of the surrounding youths from Ling Family all went cold, as they grew annoyed.

Ling Ying hmphed. Her pretty face was full of disdain, as she lifted her full chest, turning a blind eye to everyone's gazes.

Most of those youths were at the fourth or fifth level of Refinement, and were simply regarded as unimportant to her, who had already reached the sixth level of Refinement.

The only one in her eyes was Ling Feng, who had reached the seventh level of Refinement.

Ling Feng slightly frowned, "Little Ying, you haven't been at Ling Town for that long, which means you have never received any of Qin Lie's grandfather's benefaction, so I won't blame you for having your own views about Qin Lie. However, we children of Ling Family have all been helped out by Grandpa Qin Shan when he was still healthy. Even though Grandpa Qin Shan passed away two years ago, we still remember all the care he showed us in our hearts. On behalf of all of us, I hope you can show Qin Lie the proper respect."

Ling Yin was momentarily stunned, "His grandpa's really strong?"

“Grandpa Qin Shan was an Artificer!” Ling Feng softly yelled.

Ling Ying said in deep reverence, “Common, Profound, Earth, Heaven, Divine, with each level again differentiated into seven ranks. What level of an Artificer was he? Has he forged any spirit artifacts for the Ling Family?”

“No.” Ling Feng shook his head, “Grandpa Qin Shan only knew how to repair spirit artifacts below Common Grade Five.”

“Aiyoh, scared me to death. And I wondered how awesome he was, he’s only at that level?” Ling Ying patted her well-endowed chest, evidently making an exaggerated smile.

“To us, that is already really awesome.” Ling Feng’s expression did not waver as he continued in an undercast tone of voice: “Five years ago, when Grandpa Qin Shan came to Ling Town with Qin Lie, he sought our Patriarch and had a discussion about the cost of helping us repair our Common spirit artifacts. He asked for the right to extract ores from all those various mines in Herb Mountain, and for us to allow him and Qin Lie to live in Ling Town.”

“Three years later, Grandpa Qin Shan took Qin Lie back and forth from Ling Town to Herb Mountain’s mines. In that period of time, Grandpa Qin Shan was in charge of repairing every spirit artifact lower than Common Grade Five. As long as its level did not pass Common Grade Five, he was able to completely restore it to its original shape, no matter how severely damaged the spirit artifact,

without any trace of it ever having weakened!”

“Poof!”

Firelight ignited on top of Ling Feng’s wrist, and the scarlet bracelet on his wrist suddenly lit up with many colors!

Soon after, that scarlet bracelet miraculously transformed into a glowing hammer. The hammer was only half his arm long, and its entire body was dark red. Clumps of fiery clouds were branded on the spherical part of the hammer like tattoos, and exuded blasts of burning waves of heat.

“My Firecloud Hammer is a Common Grade Two spirit artifact and is my lifeblood. Five years ago in Glacial Mountain Range, an Ice Soul Python blasted a mouthful of cold energy into my body. My Firecloud Hammer helped me withstand the cold energy and had luckily saved me, but it was severely damaged. If not for Grandpa Qin Shan helping me repair my Firecloud Hammer, it’d probably be scrapped a long time ago.”

“There are many of our Ling clansmen whose spirit artifacts had also been severely damaged, but thanks to Grandpa Qin Shan, those damaged spirit artifacts were able to be repaired. Otherwise, our clan would’ve encountered incomparable losses.” Ling Feng lamented as he looked at Qin Lie’s figure from afar.

“But he’s already died from an illness two years ago.” Ling Ying said in astonishment.

“Our Ling Family knows gratitude! Qin Lie is just too pitiful. He was already like this when he came to Ling Town with his grandfather five years ago. When Grandpa Qin Shan was here, there were some who took good care of him, but following Grandpa Qin Shan’s death, in these two years... Sigh.” Ling Feng changed topics, then couldn’t help but sigh.

“Then isn’t Second Miss more pitiful? I heard... that the Patriarch had promised Qin Shan, that Second Miss and Qin Lie would get engaged on Second Miss’ birthday fifteen birthday next month? Since you are a native Ling Town person, can you tell me if such a thing happened?” Ling Ying suddenly lowered her voice and came closer to Ling Feng. She whispered: “Why would the Patriarch agree to Second Miss and Qin Lie’s engagement? Isn’t this just like pushing Second Miss into a pit of fire?”

“Not sure.” Ling Feng was also unclear about that.

To him, even if the Patriarch had made such an agreement with Qin Shan, after Qin Shan’s death, that agreement shouldn’t count anymore.

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Ling Dining Hall.

Three four-sided wooden tables were put together to form a huge, long rectangular table. Steamed buns, porridge, and various side dishes were arranged upon the tabletop. Ling Family’s Patriarch Ling Chengye sat upright in the head seat. Beside him on

each side was his sister-in-law, Du Jiaolan and Third Brother Ling Chengzhi. Next to Du Jiaolan were her two sons, Du Heng and Du Fei. As for the girls beside Ling Chengzhi, they were his eldest brother's daughters, Ling Yushi and Ling Xuanxuan.

Ling Family had three brothers. The eldest was Ling Chengye, second Ling Chenghui, and the third was Ling Chengzhi. Ten years ago, when Ling Chenghui broke through into the Natal Opening Realm, he underwent a fiendish rebound and died by bodily explosion. His wife Du Jiaolan brought her similarly surnamed two sons, Du Heng and Du Fei, to live in Ling Family, and used Ling Family's resources to continue cultivating.

Boundless oceans existed within this world named Spirit Realm, and upon these oceans were many continents. On these continents, all sorts of people and races unceasing refine themselves with the spirit energy prevalent everywhere, eternally pursuing the world's ultimate mysteries.

Here, strong practitioners stood tall like high mountains and peaks, possessed world-shocking apocalyptic spirit artifacts, and some strict martial forces with status covered every remote corner of this world like spiderwebs!

Here, not only did martial practitioners and spirit artifacts have distinct divisions of levels, even clans, sects, and merchant guilds formed intercrossing networks of complex factions. They also had strict social strata.

Spirit Realm's cultivation of the martial way was divided into ten realms: Refinement, Natal Opening, Manifestation, Netherpassage,

Fulfillment, Fragmentation, Nirvana, Imperishable, Void, and Genesis. The basic Refinement Realm was composed of nine levels, while the latter realms were subdivided into small levels of early, mid, and late stages.

Similarly, mystical spirit artifacts and strong artificers also had a distinct division of levels. They were: Common, Profound, Earth, Heaven, and Divine, with each level also possessing seven ranks.

What was even more peculiar was that even those clans and sectoral forces had their own divisions of levels. They were divided into five ranks: Limestone, Black Iron, Copper, Silver, and Gold, and were restricted in layers like a pyramid.

The lowest Limestone rank powers were Spirit Realm's most basic forces, and their numbers were so many, they were uncountable like specks of sand within a desert. They had no choice but to attach themselves to larger powers, rely on them to survive and cultivate, and allow their dignity to get trampled on.

As for those Gold rank forces at the apex of the pyramid, they were all the most glorious peak existences. Not only did they have access to the strongest martial practitioners in the world, they had the most mystical of spirit artifacts, the widest ore vein territories, the most mysterious of forbidden secret realms, and they even commanded many Silver, Copper, Black Iron, and Limestone ranked forces!

Any order they passed down were capable of changing the color of the world, dye mountains and river into the red of blood, and annihilate millions and millions of living creatures!

And Ling Family, was merely a small clan power that wasn't even of the Limestone rank. Ling Family and its surrounding small families all attached themselves to Icestone City's Limestone ranked force, Nebula Pavilion. They had to send enough offerings to Nebula Pavilion every year in order to obtain Nebula Pavilion's protection, and live in Ling Town.

"Tap, tap!"

The sound of footsteps that came from afar approached. Not long after, Qin Lie's figure punctually appeared. He mechanically sat in the seat opposite Ling Chengye with a blank expression on his face, then lifted his rice bowl and began to eat.

Over the past five years, Qin Lie always arrived right on time for early morning breakfast. Even though Qin Lie was a fool in the eyes of everyone in Ling Town, his habit of being on time for meals had never changed. For the first three years, it was always Qin Shan who had brought him over. After Qin Shan's death, Qin Lie came alone, and still maintained this custom.

After eating breakfast everyday, Qin Lie would enter the Herb Mountain behind Ling Town and go into those mines within the mountain. Only until it turned dark would he return to Ling Town before supper. After having the evening meal with the Ling Family, he would return to his residence to rest.

Day after day, year after year, this was how he lived, without any ripple or change in his lifestyle.

It had been five years, yet no one knew what exactly he and his grandfather were doing to spend so much time in Herb Mountain's mines. Even Patriarch Ling Chengye had always been puzzled.

"Hey!" Du Fei suddenly couldn't help but sneer. He slanted his eyes and glanced at Qin Lie, then taunted mockingly: "My future Brother-in-law's table manners aren't bad. It's fine even if he gets engaged to Xuanxuan next month. Just pretend that you're raising an oddly cute obedient dog."

After he finished speaking, Du Fei laughed weirdly while looking in Ling Xuanxuan's direction.

Ling Xuanxuan's delicate body that was wrapped in fiery red leather armor was already beginning to show the first signs of appeal. She had an extremely small elegant face, spirited intelligent eyes, yet her barely fifteen year old self's reputation was widespread.

"Bang!"

Ling Xuanxuan's halfway exposed jade white hand heavily slammed on the table. The rice bowl in front of her violently leaped up due to the impact, and the unfinished porridge splashed toward Du Jiaolan's family of three who were sitting on the opposing side. Even though the three's reaction speed was extremely fast, they were still splashed into a miserable state by the porridge.

“I’m not going to get engaged to him even if I die!”

Without waiting for Du Jiaolan to get angry, Ling Xuanxuan quickly got up. Not even caring about her father Ling Chengye’s unsightly expression, she charged out of the room like a ball of flame.

After encountering the wooden door, she swung her little hand and an orange colored flame suddenly shot out, splitting the wide wooden door apart. Before the ten or so pieces of broken wood had time to fall on the ground, Ling Xuanxuan’s exquisite figure had already disappeared.

Just as Ling Chengye was prepared to angrily admonish her, he was suddenly stunned in place. He looked at the broken down pieces of wood, then his eyes slightly lit up, as he revealed a thoughtful expression.

“Big Brother! When did Xuanxuan step into the seventh level of Refinement? The emission of spirit energy, this is clearly an indicator of the seventh level of Refinement!” Ling Chengzhi said with uncontained excitement. His entire face was filled with pleasant surprise, “To have stepped into the seventh level of Refinement at fifteen, Xuanxuan’s natural talent is even more shocking than Yushi! At her current rate, she will surely be able to step into the Natal Opening Realm before the age of twenty... In the future, she will definitely be able to receive Nebula Pavilion’s good graces!”

Ling Chengye restrained his inner excitement, coughed lightly, and asked Ling Yushi, “When did Xuanxuan break through?”

Ling Yushi, who donned a long green dress had her dark, long hair spread over her shoulders, the expression on her delicate face was as graceful as an orchid flower. Her skin that was as white as jade and her figure that seemed tall and slender even when sitting down, caused the gaze of Du Heng, who was sitting on the side to heat up, as his gaze wouldn't even move away from her body for even an inch.

"She just broke through seven days ago. At first, she wanted to immediately rush over and tell daddy this news, but..." Ling Yushi changed topics and sighed lightly: "But two days ago, she unexpectedly heard about daddy already having promised Grandpa Qin Shan that she will be engaged to Qin Lie on her birthday, so..."

Ling Yushi didn't continue, but Ling Chengye had already guessed the cause with a helpless expression.

"Whoosh!"

Right at this moment, Qin Lie, who acted as though no one else was present and was immersed in eating, suddenly stood up as though he had not heard anyone speaking or clashing. Just like how he had acted in the past, he left after eating his fill.

He headed directly toward the Herb Mountain behind Ling Town.

"Big Brother, I have a few words I want to discuss with you in private." Ling Chengzhi also suddenly got up and shot his elder

brother a meaningful look. After Qin Lie had left, he also left the dining hall.

Ling Chengye followed behind him with a pensive look on his face.

On the rugged uneven mountain path, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi maintained a steady distance from Qin Lie while also walking in the direction of Herb Mountain. The two's gazes swiftly landed on Qin Lie's body, as they chatted in a low voice.

"It's been five years. Since the time Qin Shan had brought Qin Lie over, this grandfather-grandson pair were always in the mines during the day. Big Brother, aren't you curious about what they were doing in the mines? What they discovered?"

"Of course I'm curious. But I had an agreement with Qin Shan to not charge into the mines without reason. Besides, our Ling Family have already cleared Herb Mountain's mines for many years, and never found any valuable spirit stones. Else, why would I promise the mines to that grandfather-grandson pair?"

"And what exactly is going on with Xuanxuan and Qin Lie's engagement? Big Brother, I know you would never sacrifice Xuanxuan's lifelong happiness, so why?"

"Before Qin Shan passed away, he adamantly wanted me to agree to this matter. On behalf of all the help he gave us these few years, I made the promise with gritted teeth. But it isn't like how you think it is. He probably wished that Qin Lie would be able to

continue being looked after by our Ling Family after he passed away."

"What do you mean?"

"It is merely an engagement. Qin Lie and Xuanxuan are both fifteen years old. He requested for us to take care of Qin Lie until he turns seventeen. Once Qin Lie turns seventeen, any one of us could break off the engagement. The reason why this engagement exists is because he wanted Qin Lie to have the status of a son-in-law, so that our Ling Family members won't mess around with him, that's all."

"Don't worry. Xuanxuan has already broken through into the seventh level of Refinement. She will definitely enter Nebula Pavilion in the future. I obviously will not allow Qin Lie to influence her future prospects. When the time comes, I will immediately break off the engagement!"

"So that's how it is." Ling Chengzhi nodded. He muttered: "Big Brother, I have something that I'm not sure whether I should say, sigh..."

"If you have something to say, just say it!" Ling Family's Patriarch shouted with a frown.

"Based on what you have said, the engagement is merely for appearance's sake. If that's the case, Xuanxuan doesn't really have to get engaged to Qin Lie. Isn't also possible for him to get engaged to Yushi instead? Even though Yushi is two years older than Qin

Lie, there should be no harm in that, right?" Ling Chengzhi probed.

Ling Family's Patriarch's complexion suddenly darkened.

"Big Brother, since Sister-in-law had passed away much too early, I know that you love Yushi and Xuanxuan both equally. I am also the same." Ling Chengzhi considered his phrasing, and said sincerely: "However, even an engagement could influence a girl's reputation. Xuanxuan is only fifteen, but she actually reached the seventh level of Refinement! Even in normal times, you and I could see her talent for cultivation and her comprehension of spirit arts far surpass Yushi's. Xuanxuan's future... absolutely cannot be bound. She will become our Ling Family's true hope!"

When the conversation reached here, Ling Chengzhi's expression became respectful, "In the future, Xuanxuan will enter an even higher world of martial practitioners, reach a level that we can't even hope to attain! Under this kind of situation, there is a chance that she could marry into a powerful force whose power we can't even imagine! However, if she has a past engagement, then she'll have a stain. This will affect her future prospects..."

"Third Brother, you are becoming more and more pragmatic." Ling Family's Patriarch shook his head and sighed, "Allow me some time to think about this. Sigh. With Yushi's gentle temperament, I know that she will definitely agree to this if I ask her to bear this burden, but I just can't do this to her..."

"For the clan's future, and also for Xuanxuan's future, I ask Big Brother to seriously consider this." Ling Chengzhi said with

persuasion.

Ling Family's Patriarch remained silent for a long time. After a long while, he finally spoke: "Let's not talk about this for now. You've always been in charge of Herb Mountain and I've never asked you about it much. Why are you insisting on taking me to Herb Mountain today?"

"You'll understand when we get there. I have a faint feeling that this matter may have something to do with Qin Lie."

Chapter 2: Herb Mountain

Ling Family's Herb Mountain was an expanded branch of the Arctic Mountain Range, and was classified as the outermost region of the Arctic Mountain Range.

Compared to those huge, extremely tall ice mountains, Herb Mountain was extremely unremarkable; its spirit energy was also not considered rich.

Ling Town was exactly at the edge of the Arctic Mountain Range, beneath Herb Mountain.

Even though Herb Mountain's spirit energy didn't stand out, the mountain wasn't quite as cold since it was far enough from the center of the Arctic Mountain Range, thus making it suitable for growing spirit plants.

The spirit plants on Herb Mountain were precisely the main source of income for the Ling Family. The annual offerings Ling Family made to Nebula Pavilion were also mostly spirit plants from Herb Mountain. In these couple of years, Ling Chengzhi was in charge of the planting and picking of spirit plants. Du Jiaolan tried to get a share of the Herb Mountain pie several times, but every one of her plans were destroyed by the Ling Family brothers.

Like chunks of tofu, there were blocks and blocks of medicinal gardens on Herb Mountain. Planted within the medicinal gardens were mostly spirit plants and herbs below Common Grade Three. Even though they weren't worth much, there were still lots of

them.

The Common Grade Three spirit plants among them included the Jade Hand Flower, Cold Containing Grass, and the Serpent Crown Flower, and they were the most important spirit plants grown in the medicinal gardens. These three spirit plants were basic ingredients in refining Spirit Recovering Pills, which Nebula Pavilion greatly demanded every year.

At this moment, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi stood in front of a Jade Hand Flower medicinal garden.

When in full bloom, it looked like a young girl spreading open her palm. Its five slender leaves were like five slim fingers, which was why it was called the Jade Hand Flower. The period between planting and picking the Jade Hand Flower was only around half a year, and it wasn't really affected by changes in the weather. This made it one of the easiest spirit plants to cultivate.

However, in this current Jade Hand Flower medicinal garden, each and every Jade Hand Flower had yet to bloom; instead, each and every one of them were wilted, causing Ling Chengye's expression to turn extremely ugly.

"Is it only the Jade Hand Flowers that are like this?" Ling Chengye asked with some hope.

Ling Chengzhi smiled wryly, "The Jade Hand Flowers can be considered good. The Cold Containing Grass and the Serpent Crown Flower medicinal gardens are even more unsightly, they're

even more intensely dried up. I'm afraid that it will be hard for us to gather this year's payment of medicinal herbs to Nebula Pavilion..."

Ling Chengye's expression changed, he shouted in an overcast tone of voice: "How exactly did this happen? Why didn't you tell me this sooner?!"

"I don't know how this happened." Pain spread across Ling Chengzhi's face as his heart also filled with confusion, "Since Qin Shan died two years ago, the garden's medicinal herbs yielded less and less crops every season. Though each return was bringing in less and less, it was still enough to supply Nebula Pavilion. This is also my fault, I was too busy trying to break through that I didn't seriously pay attention to it."

"Once I was aware of this dire situation, I believed that I could still control this. I spent most of my time cultivating and conditioning the spirit herbs, hoping that I could reverse this situation. However, what I didn't expect was that since three months ago, the medicinal herbs gradually looked more and more wilted by the day. Before I had time to react, large expanses of medicinal herbs inside the medicinal garden had already withered..."

Ling Chengzhi hung his head in dismay, appearing as though he wanted to hit something and cry, but he didn't dare to avoid his responsibilities.

Ling Chengye's face collapsed. He was silent for a good while, then suddenly said: "What does the drying up of the herbs in the

medicinal garden have to do with Qin Lie? He's usually deep inside Herb Mountain's mines, and ought to never have come to the gardens before. He's able to affect these herbs? Old Three, why do you suspect Qin Lie?"

To him, Qin Lie was only a fool. For a person without a soul, it was absolutely impossible that he could influence Herb Mountain's yield.

"Since their grandfather-grandson pair entered Herb Mountain's mines five years ago, I've been secretly observing them. Over the past five years, there were very few changes in Herb Mountain, but there was an extremely strange phenomenon..." Ling Chengzhi creased his brows as he pondered while speaking.

"What kind of strange phenomenon?" Ling Chengye was stunned.

"Every time it thunderstormed, the lightning above Herb Mountain's skies would be extremely condensed. Each lightning strike would hit Herb Mountain's summit, and that lightning would sometimes come here, even causing me to watch in fear. However, before their grandfather-grandson pair came, no matter how vile the weather, there wouldn't be that much lightning assembled above Herb Mountain's skies, nor the phenomenon of lightning directly striking down here!" Ling Chengzhi said with certainty.

"This lightning... has something to do with their grandfather-grandson pair?" Ling Chengye shook his head, feeling as though his younger brother's speculation didn't have much of a

foundation.

"Big Brother, let me finish." Ling Chengzhi's expression gradually turned solemn, "After Qin Shan passed away, this phenomenon became even more apparent! In these past two years, every time there was a thunderstorm, there was even more lightning gathered above Herb Mountain, and it struck Herb Mountain more frequently! Sometimes, I could faintly feel those powerful lightning strikes skirt into the mountain's cavity..."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chengye finally faced up, and solemnly said: "Continue!"

"I have been guarding Herb Mountain all these years, and every time lightning struck, I was always mindful of the mine caves. I've seen Qin Lie walk out from those caves several times with his hair and skin a bit burnt black. I can say with total certainty that it was definitely caused by a lightning strike!" Ling Chengzhi shouted softly, "Due to all the abnormalities in Herb Mountain these past years, I am within reason to suspect that this has something to do with Qin Lie! Big Brother, the medicinal herbs would not wither without cause. I believe that something must have changed within Herb Mountain's interior to have lead to the withering of the medicinal herbs!"

Ling Chengye deeply frowned. After a long period of silence, he suddenly said: "I promised Qin Shan that I would not enter the mines without reason."

"Big Brother, if this matter really has something to do with Qin Lie, if you don't figure this out, I'm afraid that it would be difficult

to save those medicinal herbs in the garden. Herb Mountain concerns our Ling Family's growth. If we keep going on like this, our Ling Family would not be able to gather enough spirit plants as payment, then Nebula Pavilion..." Ling Chengzhi said with immense worry.

Ling Chengye went silent again. After a long while, he took a deep breath. He took out a ghastly demon mask, silently put it on, changed into a long white robe, and then said shouted lowly: "I will secretly go investigate the mines. You are forbidden to tell anyone about this matter!"

"Rest assured Big Brother, I know what to do."

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Like a white specter, Ling Chengye cautiously went to a cave in a remote corner of Herb Mountain. With his hands grabbing onto a hanging vine, he stepped off the boulder, and his silhouette silently floated down like willow leaves, quickly arriving in one of the tunnel entrances of a mountain cave.

Since he had already decided to do this, Ling Chengye no longer hesitated. He directly charged into the mouth of the cave, heading into its depths at high speed.

There were many caves of different sizes at the back of Herb Mountain, and they were all formed by Ling Family members who excavated from different angles. Each and every mountain cave pathway were even all linked together, so as long as one entered

one of the caves, it was extremely easy to find a path that lead into the mountain's belly.

However, not long after Ling Chengye entered the cavern, he suddenly received a huge shock which left him stiff in place.

In his memories, there were at most twenty tunnels inside Herb Mountain. Even though he hadn't come in here for quite a long while, his memories about the mines were still very clear.

Because when he was young, he was also one of the excavators, so he was extremely familiar with this place.

But right now, he felt as though he had come to the wrong place, because the tunnels in this mountain cavity was ten times more than that!

The complexity of those tunnels in front of him intersected and connected like spiderwebs. Ling Chengye was startled at this abnormality, not feeling any familiarity with this place.

"Heavens! How did they do this?" Ling Chengye sucked in a cold breath.

He still remembered back then when several scores of Ling Family members came together. They used three years of time, and merely excavated a dozen or so stone tunnels.

Yet this grandfather-grandson pair had actually excavated

several hundred stone tunnels in five years of time. This caused Ling Chengye to not dare believe his own eyes.

Several hundred stone tunnels interweaved and connected with the original stone tunnels in a maze-like complexity, similar to the varying strangeness of muscles in the human body.

Ling Chengye forced himself to calm down. He began traveling back and forth through several hundred intersecting stone tunnels, attempting to enter the deepest part of the mountain, seeking Qin Lie's figure.

An hour later, Ling Family's Patriarch's consciousness unexpectedly became muddled, and in muddled state, he directly appeared in the cavern entrance.

When he regained his senses, his expression became incomparably odd. Not believing what had happened, he once again delved into the mines, resuming his search once more...

In seven consecutive tries, he kept returning to the first tunnel entrance. Ling Chengye gradually began to tire, and his complexion paled somewhat. After checking the color of the sky, he went back up Herb Mountain along the original road in a somewhat distressed manner.

"Big Brother, your complexion does not look well, what happened? Did something happen in there?" Ling Chengzhi nervously asked him when he took down the mask.

With a wave of his hand, Ling Family's Patriarch signaled for him to not ask questions for the time being. He sat upright without saying a word, then took a Spirit Recovering Pill for his muscle pain and regulated his breathing.

Ling Chengzhi wanted to say something, but stopped and just dazedly stared at him with a belly full of stunned confusion.

The sky gradually darkened. After a period of recovery, Ling Family's Patriarch's vigor recovered somewhat. He opened his eyes, and lightly shouted, answering Ling Chengzhi's previous question: "Don't ask yet! Now should be around the time Qin Lie exits the caves to return back to Ling Town. I want make my move against him on the road back and see what exactly is going with him!"

After he finished speaking, Ling Family's Patriarch wore the ghastly demon mask without waiting for Ling Chengzhi's input. With a grave expression, he headed toward the mountain path between Herb Mountain and Ling Town to hide.

Chapter 3: Probing

“Sigh, little sis, come on, I had even told you specifically to talk about your engagement with Qin Lie after breakfast. Yet you just didn’t want to listen. Second Aunt’s entire family was still at the table, you know, so how can it be comfortable for dad to talk about things like that?”

On the mountain path between Ling Town and Herb Mountain, Ling Yushi, who was dressed in emerald green, wrinkled her brows. Her elegant and refined face was filled with rebuke as she softly chided the girl beside her.

The fiery-red leather-armored Ling Xuanxuan was like an ignited gunpowder barrel. She vented her feelings on the rock in front of her as she kicked, shattering it into pieces which flew all over. As her straightened jade leg swung back into place, it brought along a fierce gale. She snorted, “If it weren’t for that Du Fei bastard provoking me, why would I suddenly burst out? Second Aunt? That cheap slut’s not our aunt!”

“Lower your voice, you can’t recklessly speak such drivel!!” Ling Yushi hurriedly berated.

“Drivel? You guys thought I didn’t know?” Ling Xuanxuan narrowed her eyes. She laughed coldly, with a face full of resentment, “That cheap slut married our Second Uncle and stayed at our Ling Town for a mere seven months, yet she gave birth to Du Heng. Two years later, she went back to Nebula Pavilion, and not long after, she gave birth to that bastard Du Fei. Those two surnamed Du are clearly bastards of that elder cousin of hers at

Nebula Pavilion, Du Haitian!”

“Who did you hear this from?” Ling Yushi became nervous.

“I heard this from the martial practitioners in our clan who were discussing it in private. You, Daddy, and Third Uncle have always been keeping this from me because you thought I couldn’t restrain my anger and would cause trouble, right?” Ling Xuanxuan’s eyes suddenly turned red as they flooded with uncontrollable tears. She fiercely wiped once, then fumed with gritted teeth, “Second Uncle definitely didn’t die because of some stupid bodily explosion from a fiendish rebound! He was angered to death by that cheap slut’s entire family! Second Uncle loved me the most when I was young, so I will one day avenge Second Uncle!”

“Sigh, so even the martial practitioners in the clan already know about this matter. Looks like a great change shall soon come to our Ling Family.” Ling Yushi was also sad as she faintly sighed. She patted Ling Xuanxuan’s shoulder, then said sincerely, “Du Haitian’s position in Nebula Pavilion is not low, and he is also at a very high realm. It has been said that he is about to break through into the later stages of the Natal Opening Realm. At the moment, our Ling Family cannot afford to offend him…”

“I know that you and Daddy have always been enduring it; I will also endure it too. Once I break into the Natal Opening Realm and also enter Nebula Pavilion, I’ll make him pay this debt!” Ling Xuanxuan said heavily.

“It’s good that you can think this way. As long as we sisters work hard, we’ll have a place in Nebula Pavilion in the future. Second

Uncle's blood debt will definitely be paid!" Ling Yushi nodded as she proceeded to walk in Herb Mountain's direction, yet she was somewhat pained in her heart.

Even though both she and Ling Xuanxuan were at the seventh level of Refinement, she... was already seventeen years old this year. If she wanted to obtain Nebula Pavilion's favor, she had to enter the Natal Opening Realm by the age of twenty.

Going from the seventh level of Refinement directly into the Natal Opening Realm in a period of three years, how could that be easy?

Ling Yushi's eyes were filled with bitterness to the brim, as she also sighed lightly in her heart. Forcing herself to sound cheery, she said: "Dad and Third Uncle are both at Herb Mountain. Talking about this in the dining hall today was not appropriate, so big sis will come with you to find Dad, ask about this matter, and see what exactly is going on with that marriage agreement between you and Qin Lie."

"In any case, I refuse to be engaged to that fool!" Once Qin Lie was brought up, Ling Xuanxuan's little face hardened, "I don't even know what Daddy was thinking. That guy can't even talk and doesn't even have a soul. I'll get bored even if I stay with him for a short period of time, there's no way I can endure that!"

"I know, I know. Big sis obviously isn't willing to see you be together with him either. Don't worry, big sis will definitely stand by your side." Ling Yushi softly laughed and consoled.

The two sisters were like two beautiful mountain demonic foxes as they softly chatted whilst walking in the direction of Herb Mountain.

After walking for a while, just when they were about to go up the mountain, the sisters' footsteps quickly stopped, as they both looked at Qin Lie, who had exited Herb Mountain's caves.

The sky gradually darkened, and Qin Lie left the mountain cave like usual.

They were separated by some distance, but he was currently walking toward them, with that usual blank, wooden look on his face. His gaze still had no focus, as though he simply hadn't seen the two sisters coming over at all.

"Everyday in these five years were all the same, he always runs around in Herb Mountain's mines, is this fool related to rats?"

Ling Xuanxuan usually turned a blind eye and pretended he was air, so she never had any adverse reactions toward him. However, when she saw Qin Lie today, she steamed with anger, so she naturally couldn't be friendly.

"Why are you angry at him? He doesn't know anything. Sigh, he's just too pitiful. Now that his grandfather's dead, he's been passing the rest of his days alone. Our Ling Family only gives him the morning and evening meals, we don't even pay attention to anything else..."

As she looked at Qin Lie from afar, Ling Yushi sympathized with a gentle shake of her head.

“I, I know that this doesn’t have anything to do with him. It, it’s just that I can’t help but be angry when I see him...” Ling Xuanxuan was at a loss for words. A young fifteen year old girl wasn’t really this malicious at heart, but she just couldn’t accept the facts.

At this moment, a white figure suddenly came over from the forests to the side!

Ling Family’s Patriarch, who wore the ghastly demon mask, suddenly saw that his two daughters were also there, but due to the huge shock he discovered in the mines, he still resolved to test Qin Lie.

Like the embodiment of an evil spirit, Ling Chengye ruthlessly shot towards Qin Lie, who still walked onward with a blank expression, amidst Ling Yushi and Ling Xuanxuan’s surprised cries.

Seeing the white clothed figure charge over, Qin Lie’s expression was still vacant. Even as Ling Chengye swooshed in with his palm towards his chest, he still maintained his mechanical walking pace.

He didn’t stop, his expression didn’t change, and he didn’t even try to block or counter it.

“Bang!”

Ling Chengye’s palm pressed onto Qin Lie’s chest and Qin Lie’s figure was suddenly blasted several steps back. Soon after, he stood up, and blankly looked at the Ling Chengye whom had blocked his path with a puzzled expression, as though he was curious as to why this person had struck him.

This trace of curiosity was only lasted an instant. After that, he started walking again, as though he had already forgotten Ling Chengye’s previous attack, resuming his onward march.

“Who dares to behave so atrociously in our Ling Family’s territory?”

“Masked villain, you won’t escape!”

The two sisters suddenly jumped as their charming faces turned cold. They evenly advanced toward Ling Chengye as two currents of spirit energy that weren’t weak stirred, causing even the wind to howl.

On the mountain path, Ling Chengye’s back faced his two daughters who were not in the know as he stared at Qin Lie with an odd expression…

Even though the fifteen year old Qin Lie’s body looked petite and undernourished, in his palm strike earlier, Qin Lie was merely

knocked back a few steps, and didn't fall to the ground at all.

Even though there wasn't a single trace of spirit energy in that attack, Ling Chengye knew the power within that strike was enough to cause a martial practitioner at the third level of Refinement to fall, and not be able to stand up for a long while!

According to what he had sensed earlier, Qin Lie's body didn't have the distinct protection of a spirit energy barrier on his chest. This meant that there was no spirit energy in Qin Lie's body, which also meant that he couldn't be considered a true martial practitioner.

But Qin Lie had withstood the attack without even falling down!

This proved that beneath the idea of the weak looking Qin Lie having a frail body, was an unimaginable sturdy build!

Was it merely his flesh that was strong?

Ling Family's Patriarch harbored misgivings, but after a moment of hesitation, he suddenly struck yet again!

"Crack-crack-crack!"

The sound of bones cracking came from Ling Chengye's hand as it suddenly doubled in size!

A layer of thin green mist gradually rose from the hollow of his palm. Following the movement of his figure, that green mist also swayed indeterminately like a clump of burning green flame.

Green Flame Empower, Common Grade Five spirit art. This was a secret art Ling Chengye secretly cultivated and rarely used. Even his two daughters had never seen it before.

Middle stage Natal Opening Realm's Ling Chengye used spirit energy to combust a green flame in his palm and once again pressed toward Qin Lie's chest.

"Shameless villain!"

"You dare?!"

Ling Family's sisters cried in unison, but unfortunately, they were still quite a distance from Ling Chengye yell at him for now.

Ling Chengye did not hesitate at all. His twice enlarged palm that was covered in green mist was already within reach of Qin Lie's chest. He stared fixedly at Qin Lie, wanting to see an unusual change.

"Boom!"

A current of turbulent spirit energy that was mixed within the green mist entered Qin Lie's chest. In that instant, streaks of thin, cold, electric light sped through Qin Lie's vacant eyes which

seemed to never change.

At nearly the same time, the rumbling of thunder sounded in Ling Chengye's mind, catching him off guard.

It was also at this time that the Ling Family sisters finally arrived, with the intent to aggressively put him in his place.

Before Ling Chengye had time to carefully ponder whether the sudden burst of thunder in his mind and the cold electric glint in Qin Lie's eyes was just him seeing things, he saw his two daughters about to attack him, and could only grudgingly give up and retreat.

Like a wisp of white smoke, he swiftly flickered a few times and then disappeared within the mountain forest.

"Don't chase!" Ling Yushi's eyes glistened, as her tender shout stopped Ling Xuanxuan's movements. She said with a grave look on her pretty face, "Judging by how lightning fast and ghostly this person retreated, he's definitely not in the Refinement Realm! He's not someone we're able to handle by ourselves."

She crouched down and looked at Qin Lie, who fell on the floor with a dark green handprint at the place where his clothes were blasted open at the chest. She said faintly with knitted brows, "That person is very scary. But how strange, why would he attack a fool? Could it be a previous enemy of Grandpa Qin Shan?"

As she spoke, she stretched out her jade white hand and used her

lustrous fingers to lightly touch the place Qin Lie had been injured in. Then, the doubtful expression on her graceful face grew heavier, “That person obviously didn’t use all his strength, barely any spirit energy entered Qin Lie’s chest, and they’ve already begun to gradually dissipate. How odd, if he really wanted to kill Qin Lie, it shouldn’t be like this…”

Previously, Ling Chengye had his back faced to the two sisters when he attacked Qin Lie. The sisters were still some distance away at that time, so they didn’t see any abnormalities from Qin Lie; they didn’t see Qin Lie’s eyes, nor did they hear the explosion of thunder in Ling Chengye’s mind.

“Yushi, Xuanxuan, go carry Qin Lie back. If you have something to say, wait until I’m back with your father to say it!” Ling Chengzhi shouted as he suddenly appeared on Herb Mountain.

“Third Uncle, we…” Ling Xuanxuan began to shout.

“I know, a white-clothed person attacked Qin Lie. We also saw it. Your father is already chasing him. Go bring Qin Lie back first, lest another incident occurs again.” Ling Chengzhi said, playing the cover up.

Once Ling Yushi heard him say that, she didn’t think about it any further. Seeing that Qin Lie had fainted dead away, she couldn’t think of any other ways to move him, so she had no other choice but to bend over and carry Qin Lie on her back, “Ugh, this guy’s really heavy!”

The legs of the elder sister whose figure was slender and beautiful suddenly shook just as she carried Qin Lie on her back, her bright eyes revealing an expression of astonishment.

“Big sis, what nonsense are you saying? This fool is so skinny, how can he make you feel burdened?” Ling Xuanxuan curled her lips, and only thought that her elder sister was joking around.

Ling Yushi didn’t explain. She turned her head to look toward the youth who was lying on her shoulders. After seeing the face which, contrary to expectations, seemed extraordinarily handsome after the eyes were tightly shut, she stared blankly for a long time.

How strange, after this guy closes his eyes, he actually would appear to be so good-looking...

“Daddy had once said, only martial practitioners who have tempered their bodies to an extremely powerful extent, those kind of people who trained their skin, flesh, muscles, veins, connective tissues, bones, and organs to great heights, could be several times heavier than ordinary people even when weak and thin.” Seeing that she did not answer, Ling Xuanxuan continued speaking on her own with disdain: “Him? Tsk! There aren’t even any fluctuations of spirit energy inside him. Even if he is a little heavy, it would be the undigested food he ate, or maybe he is carrying some kind of heavy object on him.”

Ling Yushi, who was staring blankly and had not thought deeply about it at first, suddenly came around to realization after hearing her say these things. As she looked at the youth on her shoulder, an amazed, ambiguous expression slowly surfaced in her crystal

clear eyes.

Chapter 4: Thoughtless Tranquility

On Herb Mountain.

After the Ling Family's Patriarch took off his mask, he described in detail what he saw in the mountain caves, as well as what he discovered from when he actively probed Qin Lie two times.

"Big Brother, are you sure you're not mistaken? Ten times the stone tunnels? How can that be?" Ling Chengzhi shook his head in disbelief, then said, "Just with that grandfather-grandson pair? Even if they excavated day and night, it's still impossible for them to dig that many stone tunnels!"

"If, if Qin Shan was an extremely strong martial practitioner whose true strength was around the Fragmentation Realm, would you believe it?" Ling Family's Patriarch asked solemnly.

"Ah!" Ling Chengzhi suddenly cried out in shock as he felt his lips becoming dry. His eyes bulged, and he asked in a hoarse voice, "Big Brother, h-how could he attain such a high realm? If he truly was a person at that level, why did he come to our Ling Town?"

"Apart from this, I can't think of any other possibility." Ling Chengye's voice also trembled, "Only an expert who has attained that kind of extraordinary realm would be able to open so many stone tunnels in such a short period of time! In fact, I'd already suspected Qin Shan since long ago... Many juniors in the clan believe that repairing spirit artifacts is much easier than refining spirit artifacts, but you should know that someone who is able to

successfully restore spirit artifacts that other people have refined definitely has to be at a much higher level than the Artificer who made it!”

“You’re saying?” Ling Chengzhi was secretly shocked.

“Qin Shan was in no way simple! Perhaps, even his death, was a cover up…”

The Ling Family Patriarch’s train of thought gradually cleared, “Now that I think about it, Qin Shan’s death by illness had many doubtful points. His illness was unknown, and he wouldn’t even allow us to send for someone to treat it. Moreover, the time it took for him to die was too short, and before he died, he continuously told us that we had to bury him in the water. When we threw him in the river, we naturally could not continue investigating…”

“Are you suspecting that he faked his death?” Ling Chengzhi exclaimed.

“That is a possibility.” Ling Family’s Patriarch nodded, “The grandfather wasn’t simple, and the grandson is also weird. I can’t ascertain all this yet, but Qin Lie’s weak looking body is actually extremely sturdy! I feel that the builds of the two brothers Du Heng and Du Fei might not even be stronger than his!”

“How can that be? How can Du Fei at the fifth level of the Refinement Realm, and Du Heng at the the eighth level not be better than him?” Ling Chengzhi asked in astonishment.

“Seems like we have to pay more attention to Qin Lie in the future. It is very likely that your guess may be right. The withering of Herb Mountain’s plants and herbs may truly have something to do with Qin Lie,” Ling Family’s Patriarch said with a complex expression.

……

“Sis, where do you think that white-clothed man’s from? Why would he attack a fool? That guy’s seriously despicable!”

“Who knows? I hope Daddy and Third Uncle are able to catch him. Our Ling Family is in quite a remote location, so great martial practitioners rare come over. It really is strange.” Wearing an odd expression, Ling Yushi wrinkled her brows as her hands held the legs of Qin Lie, who was on her back.

Ling Yushi, whose figure was tall, gentle and beautiful, was two years older than Qin Lie. She was also a bit taller than him currently, while also at seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Theoretically, carrying a skinny Qin Lie on her back ought to have been extremely easy. But only she knew that she was actually somewhat burdened…

This deepened her suspicions even more, yet she didn’t talk about it. Instead, she casually teased her little sister beside her, “You actually didn’t let me down, huh. When that white-clothed man attacked Qin Lie, you immediately went and pursued him with me. Heh heh, and I’d even thought that you would watch on without lifting a finger and hoped that man in white would kill Qin Lie. That way, your worries would be settled right away.”

“Jeez. I’m not happy with what Daddy did, but I know that it doesn’t have anything to do with this fool. This fool is pretty pitiful too, I’m not that evil, you know,” Ling Xuanxuan stated.

The two sisters chatted in melodious voices as they came closer to Ling Town. Ling Xuanxuan did not pay any attention to Qin Lie since the very beginning, and Ling Yushi didn’t turn around since her first glance. She only minded the conversation she was having with her little sister and the rugged mountain path underfoot.

The two girls didn’t know that the Qin Lie they neglected had already opened his eyes some time ago. Those two eyes were bright, like cold stars, and crystal clear, no longer having any hint of their previous emptiness!

Since two years ago, this was the first time Qin Lie had awakened from deep cultivation!

The last time was when Qin Shan had awakened him before he left, and this time, he was roused by Ling Chengzhi’s attack.

As he heard the two sisters’ gentle chatter and smelled Ling Yushi’s orchid fragrance from her neck, Qin Lie’s eyes gradually lost its spirit. Upon sensing his body’s condition, he closed his eyes once more.

When he closed them, scenes flew through in his mind, as memories of the last two years flowed in like the tide…

He had always been interdependent with Grandpa Qin Shan, and only remembered memories from after he was ten. His memories from before he was ten was sealed in the Soul Suppressing Orb between his brows. According to Qin Shan, even he could not open those memories. Qin Lie had no other choice but to rely on himself to slowly open them.

Qin Shan had told him that when he found him, his memories had already been sealed.

Regarding his identity, background, parents, and the link, Qin Shan never spoke about them. He only said that the things sealed within his mind would slowly be unraveled by himself in the future.

Five years ago, Qin Shan brought him to Ling Town and taught him “Heavenly Thunder Eradication”, and used the special location of Ling Town’s Herb Mountain to help him cultivate “Heavenly Thunder Eradication”.

Apart from sealing ten years of his memories, the Soul Suppressing Orb that was implanted between his brows had tons of clever uses. The orb allowed him to be in the optimal cultivation state —— Thoughtless Tranquility!

The so-called Thoughtless Tranquility allowed a person to enter a special state when cultivating. It was rumored that the spirit of martial practitioners that entered the Thoughtless Tranquility state would separate from their physical body. Then, within a

special space, they could even look at their corporeal body.

When they left that body that was controlled by the mind, they would be able to perfectly enact the martial arts they had cultivated before using the mind, which is also the so-called consciousness of martial practitioners, and view it from afar.

In that mysterious state, cultivating took half the work to gain twice the results; this was the cultivation state every martial practitioner yearned for!

The Thoughtless Tranquility cultivation state also had a mythical ability —— it could greatly increase a martial practitioner's tolerance for pain!

"Heavenly Thunder Eradication" was an extremely overbearing, terrifying spirit art. It draws in the lightning from the Ninth Heavens to temper the corporeal body. When ordinary people cultivated "Heavenly Thunder Eradication", they would often suffer the most unbearable, extreme pain that either shattered their souls or left them an idiot. Even practitioners with the greatest of perseverances would find it difficult to continue cultivating.

As long as one was human, it was almost impossible for one to endure the pain of lightning strikes for a long period of time. This was even more difficult to endure for martial practitioners that have just started cultivating.

"Heavenly Thunder Eradication" also had to be cultivated from

the Refinement Realm, which was why seeking to cultivate “Heavenly Thunder Eradication” had always been just a beautiful fantasy...

Because the bodies of martial practitioners that have just started cultivating were weak, they were incapable of enduring the painful persecution of thunderbolts. Thus, no one had actually truly successfully cultivated “Heavenly Thunder Eradication”.

However, the miraculous cultivation state of Thoughtless Tranquility could allow a martial practitioner’s soul to break away from the body. This would greatly weaken one’s perception of pain.

Using Thoughtless Tranquility to cultivate such an overbearing art like “Heavenly Thunder Eradication” actually had a possibility of success!

And Qin Lie, because of the Soul Suppressing Orb’s special effects, had already cultivated “Heavenly Thunder Eradication” for a full five years.

During these five years, he had always been in that bizarre state, with his soul consciousness separated, while ordering his corporeal body to use his subconscious to follow his usual customs and painstakingly cultivate “Heavenly Thunder Eradication”.

Cultivating “Heavenly Thunder Eradication” used spirit energy to draw in thunder and lightning to cultivate the body, muscles, veins, and bones. The spirit energy he accumulated in these years

all entered into the scattered thunder and lightning which filled his bones, muscles, and veins.

Even if he didn't cultivate, due to his body getting electrocuted, the pain and injuries his body would suffer needed the nourishment of spirit energy.

This was why his spirit energy would disappear not long after every time he cultivated a bit of spirit energy.

Previously, when he had come out from the mines, the spirit energy in his body had long been depleted. This was the reason why Ling Chengye and his daughter couldn't feel any spirit energy within him when they probed him.

Due to him being unable to preserve spirit energy for a long time, he didn't even know which level of the Refinement Realm he was currently in. And it was because of his soul having floated away that his expression was vacant like a idiotic fool's that he was ignored by everyone, even so much that he incurred their hatred.

In these five years, he had only woken up two times altogether.

The first time was two years ago, when Qin Shan woke him up, saying that he would leave for a trip, that it may be a long time before he comes back, and perhaps he may not ever be able to come back...

This was his second time waking up.

“Almost there, in just three more months, the foundations for Heaven Thunder Eradication will truly be laid. At that time, there will be no more need to keep cultivating stuck within the Herb Mountain mines. I am even faster than Grandpa anticipated, too bad that it’s already been two years since Grandpa left. Two years passed, I really wonder how Grandpa is doing right now…”

Laying on Ling Yushi’s soft and supple back with his eyes closed, Qin Lie thought in silence.

“My two younger sisters, why did you come back from the Herb Mountain’s direction? Huh, Yushi, why are you carrying Qin Lie?”

At Ling Town’s entrance, Du Heng siblings and a few martial practitioners Du Haitian set up at Ling Family leisurely stood. The moment Du Heng saw that the fool Qin Lie was actually lying atop Ling Yushi’s beautiful figure, his face that could sort of be regarded as handsome was suddenly brimmed with gloominess.

He knew extremely long ago that his true father was Du Haitian, and not the dead Ling Chenghui. Naturally, he also knew that he didn’t have a single bit of blood relation with the Ling Family’s sisters. As Ling Yushi, who was extraordinarily good looking since childhood, grew older, her figure became increasingly alluring, provoking more and more fanciful thoughts, causing him drool in secret and birth lustful intentions.

Once he saw Ling Yushi walking over carrying Qin Lie on his back, he felt unwell, as though he had eaten a fly, and wished that

he could blast that fool into pieces.

"We went to search for some medicinal herbs at Herb Mountain, and saw someone attacking Qin Lie on the way. He received injuries, so we are taking him back first..." Without calling out 'Elder Brother Du Heng', Ling Yushi simply explained for a bit, then was about to pass Du Heng and company without any intention to throw in another word.

"How truly interesting, who would go assault a fool?" With his face overcast, Du Heng spoke loudly, "Seeing that you are strenuously carrying him, let me take this idiot back for you!"

As he finished speaking, without even waiting for Ling Yushi to respond, Du Heng's figure flashed, He came to Ling Yushi's side extremely quickly, and went on to pull Qin Lie without allowing any objection.

With his eyes closed, Qin Lie coldly snorted in his heart. When Du Heng took action, he even slightly exerted himself, and voluntarily leaned toward him.

"ARGHH!"

After Du Heng took Qin Lie on him, a miserable shriek sounded.

He didn't expect at all that Qin Lie would actually be so heavy. He felt as though a mountain had explosively pressed down on him. Caught off guard, Du Heng dropped down so hard that his head

became muddled. His embroidered clothing was covered in dust, contouring an extremely sorry figure.

Du Fei and those martial practitioners Du Haitian set up here all knew about Du Heng's strategy. As they looked forward to see some mockery happen, each and every one of them that had been laughing suddenly stopped uttering a single sound at this moment.

"No need for your help," Ling Yushi reacted very fast, and while Du Heng was staring blankly, she hurriedly carried Qin Lie back up again and threw a meaningful glance at Ling Xuanxuan, as the two sisters urgently crossed over the crowd and left.

"Big Brother, what kind of play are you enacting?" After some time, Du Fei asked while stunned.

De Heng finally regained his senses, and as he looked at the slowly withdrawing Ling Yushi and the Qin Lie who was on her back, he suddenly shouted deeply, "That fool is ridiculously heavy, he must have some extremely heavy object on him! It's been five years, that fool has always been in the Herb Mountain mines, could it be that he made some discoveries? It must be so! Otherwise the Ling Family sisters wouldn't be so eager! The fool is perhaps carrying treasure on him!"

As these words were uttered, Du Fei and the surrounding martial practitioners became increasingly astonished.

Chapter 5: Soul Suppressing Orb

“Phew!”

Ling Yushi let out a heavy sigh as she tiredly placed Qin Lie on the bed; suspicions and doubts filled her youthful bright eyes.

This was the stone house which Qin Lie stayed in all year round. It had a total of three rooms, one of the empty rooms formerly belonged to Qin Shan, while the other was a bathing room.

In Ling Town, such stone houses were very common, and most martial practitioners of Ling Town live in similar homes.

This stone house that belonged to Qin Lie only had a stone table, two stone stools, and an additional wooden bed. Other than these, there wasn’t any other furniture.

“Big sis, just what was going on with that Du Heng earlier? I heard that bastard has been running off to Icestone City recently. Could his body have been hollowed out by wine and women? How was he unable to even lift this idiot?” Ling Xuanxuan doubtfully asked.

After placing down Qin Lie, Ling Yushi first inspected carefully for a moment. In front of her eyes, the green-colored palm mark on Qin Lie’s chest was gradually disappearing. She positioned her finger below his nose for a little while. Only after realizing that his breathing was uniform and strong, was Ling Yushi then able to calm down, and said. “He shouldn’t have any major problems. The

injuries on his chest should be fine in two days, let us return for now.”

Ling Xuanxuan didn’t even want to stay here for another second. The instant she heard Ling Yushi, she immediately stood up, and Ling Yushi followed right after. Right as she was about to leave the stone house, she once again turned her head around and deeply looked at Qin Lie, whose eyes were tightly closed.

……

A long while later, Qin Lie suddenly sat up from the bed. After closing all the doors and windows tightly shut, he once again returned to the bed.

Within the dark room, Qin Lie’s eyes brightly gleamed. Looking carefully, it looked as though one electrical current after another was coursing through his irises, appearing extremely strange and bizarre.

“Bzzt, bzzt!”

The sounds of electrical currents running, gradually came from within his body. At this moment, an aghast aura seemed to be leaking out from his body.

When this aura accumulated to its peak, a point of dim light flashed at the center of his forehead, and a pitch-black orb the size of a broad bean floated out from the middle of his forehead.

The ever pitch-black bead glowed with a dim light. At first glance, it looked as though he gained an additional eye at the center of his forehead.

Concentrating his spirit and willpower, Qin Lie roared out explosively in his heart. With a ferocious expression, he assaulted the seal within the orb.

“Boom!”

His mind consciousness poured into the seal, as though they were heavily striking an invisible barrier. His brain suddenly felt an incomparably piercing pain, and his mental strength loosened at that moment.

The aura which he had bitterly accumulated vanished right after. He tiredly leaned against the corner of the wall, and sighed. “It’s still impossible.”

Two years ago, when he was awakened by Qin Shan, he had tried to assault the memory seal within the Soul Suppressing Orb as well. In the end, he experienced the same failure as today.

After two years, he felt that his strength had greatly improved. He initially believed that there was hope in breaking the seal, but unfortunately, it didn’t go as he had wished, as he once again faced defeat.

Within the five years of “Heavenly Thunder Eradication” cultivation, he had long tempered a tenacious willpower, so he wasn’t overly depressed. Very quickly, he began to carefully pondered about the matters of today.

“Who exactly wanted to make a move against me? Grandpa’s enemy?”

Because ten years of his memories were sealed, added with the fact that Qin Shan had never spoken to him much about his identity and background, he was unable to come up with an answer.

“No matter who it is, it seems like I cannot continue maintaining the cultivation state of Thoughtless Tranquility for the time being. Otherwise, if that person were to once again make a move, there’s a huge possibility that he would deal a fatal blow.”

……

“Is Qin Lie alright?” In the Ling Family Hall, the Patriarch of Ling Family questioned his two daughters. Ling Chengzhi was present at the side as well.

“Today, that white-clothed man did not land a killing blow. The spirit energy that was inserted into Qin Lie’s chest has already dispersed to a certain extent as well, so he should be able to recover in two days.” Ling Yushi replied, and then asked. “Daddy, did you exchange blows with that white-clothed man? Were you able to identify his identity and background?”

Ling Chengye shook his head. “I did not catch up to him. His level of strength shouldn’t be inferior to mine. I find it strange as well, as I’m unclear of why he would make a move against Qin Lie.”

“Daddy, today, when I carried Qin Lie back, I realized... that he’s very very heavy.” Ling Yushi finally revealed the doubts in her heart.

“Very heavy? Much heavier than regular people?” Ling Chengye’s expression changed, evidently, he was taking this seriously.

“He’s heavier than regular people by five times, or more!” Ling Yushi exclaimed tenderly.

“He must have some sort of heavy object on his body.” Ling Xuanxuan curled her lips.

“He might really have some sort of heavy object on his body, but there are boundaries a man and woman shouldn’t step across, so it wasn’t good for me to carefully inspect his body. Of course, there’s also another possibility... But speaking of it will be too unthinkable, that even I don’t even dare to believe it’s actually so.” With clear eyes, Ling Yushi doubtfully shook her head.

The two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, made eye contact, and were both able to see the surprise in each other’s eyes. The two’s thoughts were both concentrated on the second

possibility which Ling Yushi had said, and for a moment, they did not give a response.

"Daddy, even if I have to die, I won't marry that fool! If you truly wish to insist upon it, I will run away from the house sooner or later, and will never ever return to the Ling Family!" At this moment, Ling Xuanxuan's suppressed fury had finally exploded. Balling up her two fists, she glared at Ling Chengye like a little female tiger.

Waving his hands, Ling Chengye said. "Naturally, I will not truly have you marry Qin Lie. It's just that our Ling Family has received a favor from Qin Shan, and we have even promised him that we will take care of Qin Lie until he is seventeen years old. Mn, you and Qin Lie will only be engaged, and going through the motions. After two years, we will remove the engagement, so there will not be any implications between the two of you."

"So that's the case. It's just as I have said, how could daddy be so ruthless to sacrifice little sis's lifetime of happiness." Ling Yushi smiled as she heaved a sigh of relief. "You should be relieved now, right?"

"Being engaged doesn't sound good to the ears either!" Ling Xuanxuan pouted with her little face, and snorted. "The moment we're engaged, I will have to endure the gossips and rumors of everyone else, and I will even have to endure them for exactly two years. I won't be able to endure it, and I won't be able to concentrate on my cultivation! If, within the span of two years, my realm of strength still doesn't make the slightest improvements, then you'd best not blame me for not being able to live up to your

expectations!”

After saying these words, Ling Xuanxuan grumpily, and wilfully sprinted off.

When these words fell, the expressions of the brothers Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi changed at the same time, as these words had truly struck their weak points.

The two brothers had placed too much hopes on Ling Xuanxuan, both expecting that by relying on Ling Xuanxuan’s incredible cultivation talent, she could help flip Ling Family’s current standings, completing the ideal in their hearts.

Everything, was built on Ling Xuanxuan’s constant breakthroughs. If Ling Xuanxuan was still unable to enter the Natal Opening Realm before the age of twenty, then all their efforts would have been wasted.

The two brothers pulled long faces, and let out their sighs. Their expressions were filled with helplessness and anguish.

Ling Yushi watched everything unfold before her eyes. She silently struggled, as pain constantly poured out from her heart.

After a long, long while, suddenly, she faintly said. “How about allowing me to replace little sis in the engagement with Qin Lie then? My talent cannot be compared to little sis’s, and there shouldn’t be any hopes for me to step into the Natal Opening

Realm before the age of twenty. Little sis... will become the hope of our family. As her elder sister, for the family, for little sis, I should take up a few more burdens."

The two brothers never expected that Ling Yushi would actually take the initiative to shoulder this. Due to the unexpectedness, the two of them revealed sour looks. Their hearts similarly felt uncomfortable, as they did not know what they should say.

Ling Yushi forced out a smile. That smile caused the two brothers to become increasingly disheartened, so much so that they were unable to hide their shame. "Daddy, Third Uncle, there's no need to be hesitant. After all, I'm a little older than little sis, and I'm able to see things more openly than her. I... can endure it. I know that you both have made many sacrifices for the family, and endured so much pain and bitterness. I'm no longer a child, and it's about time I shoulder some responsibility."

"Sigh, we have wronged you." The corner of the Ling Family Patriarch's eyes turned moist, as he sighed with his head lowered. "It's all because this dad of yours is useless."

"This is unrelated to daddy. I know that dad's heart is feeling very uncomfortable as well. Daddy, please make the arrangements for everything." With soft and tender voice, Ling Yushi said consolingly.

The two brothers regretfully sighed. At that moment in the hall, they set the date for Ling Yushi's and Qin Lie's engagement, and made a confirmation on this matter.

……

In another hall in Ling Town.

A beautiful fur spread across the floor. In a room filled with extravagant and luxurious ornaments, Du Jiaolan's hands held onto wine cup as she lazily leaned against the exquisite deck chair.

Although this woman's schemes were ruthless and venomous, she had a mature and moving charm, an uncommon beauty. Otherwise, Du Haitian of Nebula Pavilion wouldn't have been entranced to the point of protecting her with all his might.

"For that fool to be extremely heavy, he must have some sort of heavy object on his body. In these few years, that grandfather-grandson pair have been in the mines, and it's unknown just what secrets they're fiddling with. That old bastard Ling Chengye sternly forbade us from heading to the mines in Herb Mountain, so there's a possibility that he had made some shady deals with that grandfather-grandson pair in the dark. Today, a crowd of old and young from the Ling Family had all gone up the Herb Mountain, and Ling Yushi had even carried Qin Lie back. Something must have happened!"

With a sunken face, in front of his mother, Du Heng explained his deduction with well-chiselled words. "Mother, in the mines of the Herb Mountain, there's a possibility that some unique spirit stones have been harvested!"

Du Jiaolan's expression slightly changed. After thinking for a moment, she said. "What you have said is logical, we have indeed ignored those mines. It's about time we look into it. During the next short period of time, take note of that idiot. Find an opportunity to take a look in the mines, and find out what the hell the people of the Ling Family are doing."

"This child understands."

"Heheh. Ling Town will sooner or later become Du Town. If there are really spirit stones in Herb Mountain's mines, then they should be our Du Family's as well. We shouldn't allow them to be sneakily harvested by the Ling Family." Du Jiaolan pursed her lips, and joyfully said, as though it was a matter of course.

"Heh heh, the two daughters of that old thing, will sooner or later become toys for me and my little brother!" Du Heng grinned disgustingly.

……

The second day.

Qin Lie got off the bed on time. He did not continue borrowing the Soul Suppressing Orb to enter the Thoughtless Tranquility cultivation state. Before he left the house, he pulled out a copper mirror, and slowly adjusted his expression by looking at the copper mirror.

After a short while, seeing that the him in the copper mirror had adjusted back into his usual empty and hollow pair of eyes, he then left the stone house.

At the precise time, he stepped into Ling Family's dining hall. As Ling Chengye's family of young and old saw him arrive on time, all of their eyes evidently revealed astonishment, as they began to size him up with their stares.

Not a single wave surged in his heart, as Qin Lie began to chow without saying a single word. There was hardly any difference from his usual behavior.

He simply wished to calmly lay a firm foundation for "Heavenly Thunder Eradication" in the Ling Family. When he no longer needed to rely on the mines in the Herb Mountain to guide the bolts of lightning to temper his body, there was a possibility that he would choose to leave the Ling Family, and head out to find Qin Shan.

Very quickly, he finished his meal. He stood up blankly, and once again headed in the direction of Herb Mountain.

Within the dining hall, the crowd of Ling Family's old and young were evidently a little solemn. Du Jiaolan and her two sons began to unusually take note of Qin Jie on this day as well. Only after he left the dining hall, did the mother and two sons retracted their gazes from Qin Lie's back.

"Big Brother, Nebula Pavilion relayed a message, wanting us to

send a batch of herbs in the next few days." Du Jiaolan elegantly wiped the stains off the corners of her mouth, and casually said.

The Ling Family Patriarch's heart clenched. Frowning, he said. "There might be a need to delay a little. Recently, due to the alternating seasons of lightning and rain, there has been a slight influence to the harvesting of spirit herbs..."

"Heh heh. I will relay them in your words, hopefully, they will have some patience." Du Jiaolan was astonished. In these few years, the Ling Family had never postponed their provision of spirit herbs to Nebula Pavilion. Ling Chengye's 'delay a little' somewhat raised her suspicions. After pondering for a moment, with an ice-cold expression, she said. "The Ling Family is attached to Nebula Pavilion, so if it's just delaying for a few days, there shouldn't be a problem. But if trouble occurs to the provision of spirit herbs, I'm afraid the matter won't be that easy to solve. I believe big brother knows this point at heart, right?"

"I know propriety! I don't need you to teach me!" Ling Chengye's mood wasn't good at that moment, as he snorted annoyingly.

"Then that's good. A widow like me isn't able to manage that many affairs within the family, so I simply wish to remind big brother, that you'd better not cause a crisis for the Ling Family! Big brother should understand as well. If we lose the protection of the Nebula Pavilion, Ling Town will not be able to continue peaceful days like this!" Du Jiaolan's expression was cold, as she said with a harsh tone.

"Enough!" Ling Chengyin coldly exclaimed, as he stood up and

left the dining hall with an ugly expression.

The crowd of old and young in the Ling Family began to leave one after another as well.

“Some matters seemed to have really happened at the Herb Mountain. Heng’er, you and Du Qishan watch that place closely for the next couple of days. If you have the opportunity, head up the mountain or take a look at the mines in the mountains.” Du Jiaolan’s expression was dimly cold, as though she was a venomous snake which had hibernated for a long time, that was ready to pounce and bite people at any given moment.

……

Qin Lie walked on the stone path that lead to the mountain where the mines were.

Due to the changing of seasons, the weather was irregular, which could lead to intense thunderstorms. Unknowingly, the sky had already turned dark, while the mountain breeze whistled.

“Boom, boom, boom!”

Within the roaring thunders, flashes of lightning could gradually be seen; like serpents traversing the skies they shook their tails.

Within the flashes of lightning and roaring thunders, Qin Lie’s body trembled, as he simply felt joyful from his entire body and

heart. That pair of hollow eyes began to sparkle like stars, and within his irises, it was as though they had been branded with electrical snakes and lightning dragons, becoming shockingly bright.

"As expected, this season is the most suitable for the cultivation of my Heavenly Thunder Eradication. My luck today is really good!"

After muttering to himself, Qin Lie headed towards Herb Mountain with big strides. His pace was evidently a lot faster than before.

If there was someone by his side at this moment, they would be able to see that there was a trend of lightning bolts gradually concentrating in the direction above his head, and that person would even be able to faintly hear the constant thunderous sounds coming from his body.

The sky was filled thunder and lightning flashes, as though they had some sort of close and strange connection with him, moving for his sake!

Chapter 6: Attracting Lightning To Oneself

Herb Mountain cave.

To Ling Chengye, strange, complicated maze-like tunnels were fraught with mystery and danger. During yesterday's exploration, he did not get deep enough into the mountain's core and his efforts rendered him dizzy, almost hurting his psyche.

However, when Qin Lie entered, he was like a fish in water. He moved easily and effortlessly through the lines of stone tunnels, directly towards the deepest parts of the mountain.

While moving, his steps never faltered. It was evident that the cave's maze did not affect him at all.

Soon, he reached the belly of the mountain's core and the originally dark stone tunnels brightened.

This was a very large cave – as big as a football field. The stone wall above was over ten meters above the stone floor, and eight pillars each as thick as a man's waist stood tall in eight corners of the cave.

The eight pillars were conical, and their pointed tips were inserted into the crevices of the stone wall above, lending it the image of eight giant hands holding onto the cave itself. The sight was spectacularly grand in a cave.

The eight pillars had strand after strand of silver-colored metal wire the width of a thumb wound all around them, and these wires connected the pillars.

In the large wide cave, silver lines intersected in the middle of the octagon of pillars, like several giant spider webs interwoven together.

“BOOM! BZZZT!”

An astonishing electric current accompanied the thunder and popping. The current entered the roof of the crevice and down the eight wide pillars, then went through the wires wound around the pillars and into the huge net of wires in the middle of the pillars. Lightning appeared many times in the cave, lighting up its insides.

At the same time, in the skies outside Herb Mountain, lightning intertwined and thunder deafened the ears. It was as if lightning dragons were raging in the sky.

The dense lightning came crackling down, as though attracted by some mysterious force, pierced the upraised stone on the mountain peak, then passed in a flash.

“Come on! Hit me harder!”

In the middle of the wide cave, Qin Lie’s still somewhat immature face was full of excitement as he barged into the dense web of electricity and wires between the eight pillars.

“BZZZT!”

The current in the interwoven silver wires charged into his seemingly frail body like the cold gleam of a blade!

“HARGH!”

Countless fine lines of electricity shot into him. Qin Lie, who had disengaged Thoughtless Tranquility, felt like his soul was being pierced in ten thousand places by metal needles. He couldn’t help but emit shrill screams of agony.

Qin Lie’s body twitched in throes of pain. Madness surfaced in his eyes, like those of a desperate beast met with an unending world of pain.

Qin Lie bore pain that was impossible for normal people and gritted his teeth as he used the Heavenly Thunder Eradication Art. The disorderly lightning that had scattered after it entered his body seemed to suddenly be grabbed by an unseen hand, then sent through his tough muscles and veins, flowing quickly into his flesh and bones.

Even if ordinary practitioners were in the Natal Opening Realm, they would in all probability implode rapidly and perish if struck so by such a wild electrical current.

Threads of lightning sped around his muscles and veins at his

direction and gradually moved toward his thoracic cavity and abdomen.

The lightning passed through his muscles, veins, bones and flesh, and all these parts felt so bruised that the pain made him teeter on the brink of unconsciousness. However, he was very aware in his pain that the lightning was also becoming his flesh and bone bit by bit, making his body gradually adapt to a greater intensity of Heavenly Thunder Eradication refinement.

Over five years, and after nine days of lightning-strengthening, he gradually refined his muscles, veins, skin, flesh, limbs and bones, slowly turning the focus of his refinement to the more important internal organs.

In these past few years, his muscles, veins, flesh and limbs gradually adapted to lightning entering. If his internal organs were also tempered, he would have truly laid the foundation for Heavenly Thunder Eradication and his entire body would be completely adapted to withstand the heavenly lightning's bombardment in his refinement.

When that time comes, the cultivation of Heavenly Thunder Eradication would reach new heights and power!

The fine lines of lightning traveled along the muscles and veins of his limbs but did not enter his internal organs. Qin Lie's body convulsed instantly and coiled like a prawn that had received an electric shock. He let out scream after scream of hissing pain.

Rain poured down and the storm's rage intensified on Herb Mountain as lance after lance of lightning raced to the ground like lightning dragons, filling the cave with explosive booms.

The eight pillars flared suddenly, silver wires growing increasingly brighter and brighter with electricity. In the midst of the huge web, Qin Lie's whole body lay charred as he shook with howls of agony.

The mad roaring in the skies above slowly softened and died away as the storm lost its power. His electrocuted body, too, stopped writhing.

When the thunder and lightning passed, the rain fell harder and harder.

The heavens, having been appeased, stopped sending lightning into the cave and the pillars in the cave grew dull as the lines of silver ceased flashing.

After who knew how long, Qin Lie stirred his charred body. He lay motionless on the web of silver wires, quietly assessing the internal condition of his body.

He sunk his psyche into his body, and could almost see traces of electrical current in his chest, bouncing around his organs and flesh, continuing the refinement of his internal organs so that his body could gradually adapt to the ravages of lightning.

“If I do not enter the cultivation state of Thoughtless Tranquility, the torture I will have to endure is really beyond what normal people could imagine. It’s a good thing I’ve cultivated for five years and shaped my body and soul for so long, because even if my body can take the pain, my soul couldn’t and everything will be for naught. I would’ve become a fool for real.”

“I’m just lacking the refinement of my inner organs. If I keep at this rate, I will complete the most difficult foundation of the Heavenly Thunder Eradication Art in two or three months’ time.”

Qin Lie recovered some strength after a short rest and got down from the web of silver wires. His staggering steps brought him to the back of one of the stone pillars.

“Before he left two years ago, Grandpa told me to look at what he left me the next time I awoke…”

A square wooden box sat behind the stone pillar. It was not locked and Qin Lie opened it easily.

The wooden box contained a letter, beautifully drawn maps and a lifelike wooden figurine which looked surprisingly similar to his grandfather.

“Lie’er, Grandpa will try his best to come back for you before you turn seventeen. If I’m still not back by then, something must have happened to me. In that case, do not look for me. Cultivate well and live a good life.”

“When the day comes that you reach a sufficiently high level and break the memory seal on the Soul Suppressing Orb, you will know what happened ten years ago.”

“These maps are what Grandpa drew of things to note in the Arctic Mountain Range. There’s details on spirit plant and spirit stone locations, as well as boundaries of spirit beast activity. I have labelled the locations of spirit beasts and spirit plant that will be useful to your cultivation. Once you awaken, go pick and hunt whenever you want.”

“Over the years, Grandpa has made friends with some spirit beasts on my frequent walks in the Arctic Mountain Range. If you want to explore or cross the Arctic Mountain Range one day, remember to bring the figurine. Some of the spirit beasts recognize the figurine and will not bother you if you show it to them.”

“I have specially marked out the territory of the spirit beasts which will recognize the figurine. Take note.”

“The spirit plants and spirit herbs on Ling Family’s Herb Mountain are not able to bear the destruction of the spillover lightning. When I was around, I directed the excess lightning elsewhere so that it would not affect the spirit herbs on Herb Mountain. I made some arrangements before leaving but I was in too much of a hurry and could not finish everything. When time passes, the lightning from your cultivation will harm the growth of the spirit grasses and I am afraid that this will catch the Ling Family’s attention. You will have to keep a lookout for this.”

“The Soul Suppressing Orb is a precious treasure. It is the only

spirit artifact your parents left you. It is not just a simple item that seals your memories – it has many functions that even I am unable to completely reveal. That orb must be guarded well. Never let a second pair of eyes see it or great trouble shall descend upon you! Remember this!”

The letter was not terribly long and Qin Lie read it quickly. He pondered over its contents, then took out the maps and looked at them with rapt attention.

The topmost map was only thirty kilometers away from Herb Mountain. Locations of note on the map were circled and one of those was labelled Umbra Lightning Condor.

Spirit beasts were divided according to size and power. The weakest were Rank One spirit beasts, which were equivalent to martial practitioners of the Refinement Realm. Rank Ten spirit beasts were strongest and most terrifying. They were on the same level as the top practitioners of the Genesis Realm.

The Umbra Lightning Condor was just a Rank One beast, but tended to flock together. They had low defense, fighting smarts and travelled in groups. They were also fast. They shoot lightning, then wait for the enemy or prey to become paralyzed by the lightning before tearing into it with sharp claws and teeth.

Qin Shan marked the Umbra Lightning Condor precisely because this type of spirit beast’s beast core contained lightning spirit energy. Of course, the lightning beast cores of these beasts were a far cry from pure lightning from the skies; it was not of help in Qin Lie’s refinement of his body.

However, the Umbra Lightning Condor's beast core had other uses – after Qin Lie absorbed the lightning energy, he could easily transform it to spirit energy!

Spirit energy was the very core source of a martial practitioner's power and it was also a measure of a martial practitioner's strength and the rank of his realms.

Normally, the more refined a martial practitioner's spirit energy, the greater and more impressive his realm.

This was the reason why Qin Shan marked them – the Umbra Lightning Condors' beast cores could help Qin Lie quickly accumulate a load of spirit power.

"Umbra Lightning Condor..."

Qin Lie put the letter, maps and wooden figurine safely away and deliberated for a bit as he had pretty much awakened. Lightning-rich days would not continue day after day, so why not go to Arctic Mountain Range to try his luck and see if he could kill some Umbra Lightning Condors in order to accumulate some spirit energy, and to ascertain the realm of his true strength?

Heavy rain fell, unending, as Qin Lie left the caves of Herb Mountain and headed towards the Arctic Mountain Range by himself.

……

Mountain’s peak.

The brothers Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi stood in the rain and looked at the dying spirit plants, grasping at their umbrellas in sadness. They wanted to cry tears but none came.

When they discovered the changing skies and rumble of thunder and lightning, the brothers had hurried towards Herb Mountain. The two had arrived on Herb Mountain not long after Qin Lie entered deep within the mountain to cultivate.

Ling Chengye could honestly say that the concentration of thunderstorms and the flow of lightning was definitely closely connected to something in the mountain’s core. This finally confirmed his younger brother’s speculation.

After the lightning dispersed, the two brothers also noted that the spirit plants withered significantly faster, and came to a conclusion that there was a connection between the rate of withering and Qin Lie.

“Big brother, now is the season of thunderstorms as spring changes to summer. If this situation continues, the current crop of spirit plants and herbs are doomed to fail. The Nebula Pavilion, ah…” Ling Chengzhi shook his head and gave a bitter sigh.

“It doesn’t matter if Qin Lie is a retard or was pretending to be

retarded. I must have a proper talk with him this time!”

Ling Chengye came to one of the entrances to Herb Mountain’s caves with a dour face, suppressing his indignation as he sat in silence, waiting for Qin Lie to exit.

Unfortunately, he had no idea that Qin Lie, who had kept to the same routine for five years, had broken his routine on this very day!

Qin Lie did not leave the caves before sunset. Not long before Ling Chengye arrived, Qin Lie had braved the torrential rains and left for the Arctic Mountain Range, alone.

Chapter 7: Solitary Ridge

Ling Town's Herb Mountain was just a small ridge located at the outermost edge of the Arctic Mountain Range.

By contrast, the entirety of the vast Arctic Mountain Range spanned more than a thousand kilometers. Most of the outer regions were not particularly cold; some of the special valleys within even enjoyed spring year-round, very ideal for growing spirit plants and herbs.

However, the deeper one delved into the mountain range, the colder it became.

That cold owed itself to the enormous snow peaks and glaciers that were situated deeper into the range. They reached far above the clouds and stayed frozen year-round, continuously releasing extensive amounts of freezing air. This in turn caused the surrounding ridges to be exceedingly cold.

The cluster of glacial peaks towards the deepest region was deemed a Forbidden Zone. According to rumors, it contained an abundance of rare spirit plants and ice crystals, all of them priceless cultivation treasures of which most martial practitioners could only dream.

Since the days of old, a multitude of territorial guardians protected the habitats of rare spirit plants; even the cold glaciers and snow peaks were no different. Occupied by numerous fierce and high-ranking spirit beasts, this region was avoided by even the

most valiant of martial practitioners. Those that did travel in the Arctic Mountain Range would purposefully avoid this particular region, as they truly feared provoking the mighty spirit beasts living at the peaks.

But that didn't mean the edges and outer regions of the Arctic Mountain Range lacked spirit plants or spirit beasts; just that by comparison, the quality of plants was severely lacking, and they were scattered everywhere. Not only did martial practitioners put in a tremendous amount of effort in hopes of locating the spirit plants and spirit beasts, it also depended significantly on their luck.

Unsurprisingly, the very same region was the center of many of the martial practitioners' activities. Martial practitioners from Nebula Pavilion and its subordinate clans, like the Ling Family, practically held their activities at this region yearly, far from the Arctic Mountain Range.

After a large rainfall, the mountain passages were wet and slippery, while the air was unusually fresh.

Qin Lie, who had left Herb Mountain, followed the path towards the deeper ridges, his face revealing a hint of excitement even when his feet were heavily stained with mud.

Throughout these years, he had spent virtually all this time cultivating Heavenly Thunder Eradication. Not once had he broken his own rules, utterly sealing himself in closed-door cultivation.

He was only fifteen years old after all. Having gone through the dull training year in and year out, he was unable to contain the immense joy that spread throughout his whole body and swept all his fatigue away because at this moment, he had a chance to leap through the forests.

“I should arrive at Solitary Ridge soon, hopefully the Rank One Umbra Lightning Condors will not let me down…”

Eyeing the paths along the way, he made a mental comparison with the map he memorized before. Realizing that he would soon be nearing the Solitary Ridge that housed the Umbra Lightning Condors, he willed himself to restrain his excitement and started to focus on taking extra caution.

The Umbra Lightning Condors were only Rank One spirit beasts, possessing strength similar to that of a martial practitioner at the Refinement Realm. Condors of varying sizes would definitely have different levels of strength, but even the largest Umbra Lightning Condor would never reach the power of the Natal Opening Realm.

In Qin Lie’s eyes, even the biggest of their kind would never be a threat to him, because the Umbra Lightning Condors used the power of lightning as their trump card.

After painstakingly cultivating the Heavenly Thunder Eradication for many years, even daring to go so far as to expose his body to the power of the lighting from the Ninth Heaven, how could he possibly be scared of Rank One spirit beasts that used the

power of lightning?

His wariness was only due to the fear of meeting other types of spirit beasts.

An hour later, a ridge that was full of ancient trees gradually came into view. The trees were all taller than ten meters and supported dense foliage that completely sealed off all sunlight, making the ridge appear ominous.

He had indeed arrived at Solitary Ridge.

“Flap flap flap!”

The sound of wings flapping furiously echoed from deep within the ridge, accompanied by the screams and curses of a few youths.

Qin Lie frowned, immediately becoming aware that there were martial practitioners fighting the Umbra Lightning Condors from deeper within the Solitary Ridge. Without a second thought, he accelerated rapidly and charged up the slope towards them.

Underneath several tall ancient trees, a group of seven young martial practitioners were standing back to back, holding several weapons like swords, sabres, bows, and hammers. in their grasps. Their clothes were tattered and torn, with several bloodstains around their arms and chests. They were facing skywards, engaging the Umbra Lightning Condors that were spiraling in the sky in a life and death battle.

There were both males and females among the seven martial practitioners, all of them at the Refinement Realm. Their ages were relatively young, and they were clad in expensive clothing. Their weapons all surged with spirit energies; evidently, spirit artifacts that were actually of quality. One look was all that was needed to tell that their backgrounds were truly not simple.

The leader was a muscular youth whose weapon was a crimson longblade. His black, lengthy hair was flying all over the place as he wielded his longblade in a dance, sending out dazzling arcs of crimson light, cutting a very imposing figure.

They were surrounded by more than thirty Umbra Lightning Condors. The condors were all longer than two meters with greyish-brown feathers and beaks as sharp as hooks. Their short tail feathers were shaped like wedges, and their claws as sharp as anchors. In each of their foreheads sat a blue prismatic crystal that glistened brightly, emitting blue lightning continuously.

The Umbra Lightning Condors circled around the sky in a rapid fashion, initially assaulting the martial practitioners below with lightning from the Beast Cores on their forehead. When the martial practitioners became numb from the electric shock, the condors would immediately pounce on them, attacking with their hook-like beaks and anchor-like claws that were capable of ripping prey apart, causing whosoever that was caught to scream miserably as their skin and flesh were torn from them.

Surrounding the seven martial practitioners already laid five of the condors. They looked like they were pierced by sharp weapons,

while their feathers and blood were strewn all over. The bodies of the seven martial practitioners were covered with scars and scrapes too. It seemed that the battle had already been going for quite a while.

The teamwork from the seven were flawless; as long as one of them was stunned by the electric shocks, the other six would immediately protect him or her, frantically defending their partner despite facing the risk of severe injury.

As such, the Umbra Lightning Condors were unable to pick anyone off in a short duration despite their combined efforts, resulting in a long, drawn-out battle.

“Pooh!” Tu Ze spat a feather from his mouth, wielding his longblade with flickering rays of crimson and cursed, “Damn our rotten luck to come across this bunch of feathered beasts! Everyone better stick closer and take extra care to not get separated. If anyone hesitates to save their partners, I’ll personally skin you alive later!”

“Don’t worry, Big Brother Tu!”

“We will definitely save our partners first!”

The group of youths gritted their teeth and shouted in reply. Their breaths were stable and they were evidently battle-hardened; definitely not some fledglings that were out of their nests for the first time.

Behind one of the ancient trees, Qin Lie narrowed his eyes as he observed the fierce combat between the group of the seven youths and the condors. After a while, he understood that it wasn't looking optimistic for the youths.

Spirit beasts that lived together in herds like the Umbra Lightning Condors would take revenge for even the slightest of grievances. The moment one of their kind was killed, it became inevitable that they would pursue vengeance until their deaths!

With the existence of the five condor corpses, the battle reached the peak of hostility. The only possible outcomes were either the utter destruction of the seven youths or the complete erasure of the thirty-plus condors from existence!

The condors and youths appeared to be matched evenly in strength; if they continued fighting it could very well result in their mutual destruction, with at most, one or two surviving from either side.

"Oooouuu!"

The majestic, piercing cries of condors echoed out from even deeper within the ridge. Before long, more than a dozen Umbra Lightning Condors arrived with furious screeches, joining the others to attack the youths.

"Damn it!" Tu Ze's expression finally changed. "Looks like this rotten place is the nest of those feathered beasts! We can't afford to stay here any longer! We must hurry and find an opening to escape

or else once more of the beasts start to gather, we'll be in serious trouble!"

"While defending, we can still somewhat manage to keep our formations. However, once we move to break out of here, how will it be possible to stave off the combined attacks of the condors?" asked a young girl valiantly in her delicate voice, as her almond eyes glistened. She looked to be at most eighteen, with a smoking-hot figure complemented by her tight, black, full-leather attire, carrying a quill of arrows on her back whilst wielding her long bow.

"Zhuo Qian! We have no other choices left! We will eventually lose this battle of attrition if we do not extricate ourselves from here now! God knows if there might be more of those beasts rushing towards here? The longer we delay, the more danger we're in!" Tu Ze hardened his face in a spur of determination and hollered, "Everyone prepare to break out together with me!"

"Understood!" The group, including Zhuo Qian, replied resoundingly, and prepared to break out Solitary Ridge with their lives on the line.

At this moment, upon seeing the bleak situation of the group of youths, Qin Lie abruptly came out from his cover behind the tree and made his way towards them without a word.

"Young brother, do not proceed any further! This place is exceedingly dangerous, make haste and leave this place as far as you can! The Umbra Lightning Condors only bear hatred to the seven of us, so leave while you still have a chance!" yelled Tu Ze,

who was stunned when he suddenly discovered a stranger approaching just as he was about make his move.

Qin Lie paid his words no mind and simply revealed his teeth in a grin, maintaining his pace towards them.

“Are you a fool?”

“You trying to die?”

“Dimwit! What on earth are you doing?!”

As the crowd yelled out in shock, Zhuo Qian withdrew her beautiful slender legs, rolling her almond eyes in anger. “Where did this bastard come from? Must you insist on rushing to your death?!”

As the seven people cursed angrily from their incomprehension, Qin Lie had arrived at the side of one of the Umbra Lightning Condors that had died wretchedly. He extended his fingers to dig out its Beast Core, repeating the same actions to the rest of the corpses while ignoring the stupefied stares of Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and company, swiftly retrieving the remaining four Beast Cores.

The seven people were struck dumb like wooden dolls. They thought that he was insane and they started looking at him like he was a madman.

Did his greed have no boundaries, such that he would throw his

life away just to pick some Beast Cores?

Moreover, they were merely Rank One Beast Cores!

Plucking the cores of the fallen Umbra Lightning Condors in the faces of more than forty of their brethren only served to utterly ruffle their feathers and drive them hysterical...

Where did this idiot come from?

He's dead for sure!

The group of seven martial practitioners revealed uneasy expressions as they were certain that Qin Lie was about to be diced into multiple parts and swallowed cleanly by the condors.

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh!"

Undoubtedly, every last one of the condors were absolutely enraged by his actions to the point of completely ignoring Tu Ze and company, hurling themselves at Qin Lie with frenzied screeches, hell-bent on dismembering him.

"Is he trying to buy time for us with his life? Such a cute fellow. He has my thanks. What are we waiting for? Why aren't we escaping yet?!" Zhuo Qian asked sharply in her delicate voice.

Truly, only a woman's vicious heart could stay calm in such a

critical moment. Without moments to spare, Tu Ze and company stirred rapidly, snapping out of their daze as they promptly fled the Solitary Ridge, not even giving a second look to Qin Lie that was surrounded by gray condors as though he was engulfed by the clouds in the sky.

The seven of them were certain that his death was a definite matter, and that the condors would undoubtedly chase them when they finished dismembering Qin Lie. Therefore, they did not even so much as glance backwards, wholeheartedly focused on putting as much distance as they could between them and the condors, to gain even the slightest bit of hope at survival.

Amidst the figures of condors, concentrated blue lightning flashed down like a net, and the sizzling sound of the electric current struck terror into anyone who could hear it.

Qin Lie faced it alone.

Chapter 8: Testing The Waters

Bolts of blue lightning struck down from the sky, turning Qin Lie's expression cold. Immediately puffing his chest out, he fully channeled Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

"Bzzt, bzzt, bzzt!"

Countless bright, blue flares of electric currents simultaneously burrowed into Qin Lie. Surges of rapidly flowing lightning energy instantly started wrecking havoc within his muscles and veins.

Qin Lie's eyes suddenly lit up as he cackled in excitement.

The initial invading electric currents came violently and tyrannically. However, after channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, they were tamed in an instant, completely absorbing themselves into his skeleton.

A wonderful feeling emanated from every single pore of his body. Qin Lie's body overflowed with energy, his mind rejuvenated.

Fatal to any other normal person, the electric currents acted as high grade tonic spirit herbs to him. Not only did they fail to paralyze him, they rather left him feeling deeply refreshed and energized.

"Just what I wanted!"

Instead of the dread that he should have felt under the onslaught of the Umbra Lightning Condors, Qin Lie felt rather thrilled. When the nearest condor came within reach, his hand shot out like whip to grab it.

The condor's steely claws lashed out at him, but he caught them in each of his hands. With a shout, Qin Lie's muscles bulged and he tore the zealous condor in two, its blood and guts splattering everywhere.

One strike, one kill. He couldn't be more ecstatic. Every single condor that left the safety of the sky to engage him in melee combat on the ground would find themselves grabbed by the talons and ripped in half by his deft hands.

Previously, when the Umbra Lightning Condors assaulted Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and the rest, the condors waited until their lightning hit before ambushing the group all at once.

Despite touting cultivation levels at the late stages of the Refinement Realm, Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's bodies couldn't compare to that freak, Qin Lie. Their bodies turned numb, and their limbs fell limp the moment lightning struck them. In an instant, their combat power plummeted to almost nothing.

When battling the condors, they feared taking the brunt of the lightning attacks, to the point that when they went to rescue their incapacitated companions, they took extreme caution to avoid getting hit themselves. Thus, they gained no ground in the battle against the condors.

But Qin Lie took a completely different course of action to battle the condors!

He paid no heed to their barrage of lighting as it only served to benefit him, despite the danger it posed to Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian. It increased his combat power, stimulating his body and mind.

His body was already tough in the first place, so the fierce attacks by the Umbra Lightning Condors, with their sharp beaks and talons, failed to give Qin Lie any significant injuries.

Without a thought for protecting themselves, or their bodies' naturally inferior defense, these Rank One spirit beasts only focused on offense. They were doomed to be ripped apart the moment they were caught.

His manner of fighting was simple and direct. Cruel and violent, yet very effective!

In just a short span of time, over ten of the Umbra Lightning Condors laid at his feet after shrieking their last, miserable cry.

Any other spirit beasts would have accepted their defeat long ago, and gone running with their tail between their legs.

But not the Umbra Lightning Condors, they were all birdbrained! Although they felt something amiss as Qin Lie decimated their ranks like a natural-born predator, they couldn't stop their assault.

They set themselves into a frenzy at the sight of their slain comrades and barreled towards him without a care for their own lives.

The outcome was decided long ago.

One by one, the condors fell at the feet of Qin Lie. The fight didn't hold an ounce of suspense.

Moments later, the gruesome one-sided slaughter ended. Qin Lie stood victorious atop the pile of condor corpses, smeared and stained with their blood and feathers.

Despite his overwhelming advantage, Qin Lie's body was still full of scratches. Luckily though, it was nothing his strong constitution couldn't handle.

He understood well that to any other low-ranked martial practitioner, the Umbra Lightning Condors would have been an absolute nightmare to face.

If Tu Ze's group of seven stayed to battle, it would not have been the condors that were decimated.

Not in a hurry to harvest the beast cores, Qin Lie closed his eyes and stood in place, trying to ascertain his body's condition from within.

Current after current of electricity flowed through his veins. He

willed them steadily towards his abdomen to gather at his Dantian. Then, a warm surge of joy sprouted from the bottom of his heart and he couldn't help but reveal a large grin.

At that instant, all the power of lightning that the Umbra Lightning Condors had attacked him with were mysteriously absorbed by him! Following the channeling of Heavenly Thunder Eradication, they were slowly converted into his own spirit force!

"As expected."

At this, Qin Lie immediately felt that this trip was not a wasted one anymore. In fact, his smile became even brighter as he eyed the beast corpses around him.

……

On the other side.

Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and the rest were fleeing in a panic. Their hearts were heavy and they wore grave expressions. They had already made preparations to enter combat immediately if need be.

Even an average martial practitioner at the Natal Opening Realm would have to yield against the combined battle prowess of more than forty Umbra Lightning Condors. The young-looking Qin Lie was obviously there to feed those condors. Once he died, the condors would surely chase after them with haste.

Therefore, they didn't dare to relax a single bit for once the condors caught up with them, they would be embroiled in yet another harsh battle.

However, they didn't catch a single glimpse of the condors after their long anticipation. They started to grow suspicious.

"Stop!"

Mere steps away from completely leaving Solitary Ridge, Tu Ze finally felt that something was wrong. He signaled everyone to turn around while remaining in their defensive formation, and started to scrutinize the horizon behind them.

There was not even a shadow of a condor!

"This..."

Even the smoking hot Zhuo Qian, who remained impassive at the most critical of moments, was dumbfounded as she wiped the aromatic sweat off her neck, her beautiful eyes glistening.

"Previously, I had heard the piercing shrieks of the Umbra Lightning Condors. There was no doubt that a fight did take place...". Even though Tu Ze's appearance was crude, his thoughts were meticulous. Leaning against his long sabre, he stabilized his breathing, unwilling to waste even a single moment to recuperate his spirit force. He continued in a deep voice, "Since there isn't a trace of the condors, there can only be one possibility——that kid

is giving them serious trouble!”

“How is that possible?”, the chubby Kang Zhi exclaimed.

“The condors will definitely not chase after us without tearing that kid apart first. Since they have yet to make an appearance, it goes to show that the feathered bastards are having trouble killing him.” Tu Ze’s analysis was spot on. After pondering for a while, he gritted his teeth and shouted: “Let’s kill our way back!”

“Big brother Tu?”, Kang Zhi said bitterly while shaking his head, ”It wasn’t easy for us to escape, why should we go back in? It isn’t our concern whether the boy lived or not, what matters is we survived. Why risks our lives again?”

“Agreed,” the remaining people said in assessment. Evidently, they had enough of the Umbra Lightning Condors that did not fear death. They were very reluctant to put themselves in danger again.

“Zhuo Qian, what do you think?” Tu Ze raised his head and asked.

Shrugging the shoulders of her provocative body, Zhuo Qian revealed an expression of interest and said, ”I don’t mind. It’s just taking a look, isn’t it? Since the condors have yet to catch up with us, they naturally should have ran into serious trouble. I’m really curious to find out whether the crazy kid’s dead. We ought to thank him if he’s still alive.”

“Mn, regardless if he’s alive or not we should really thank that little brother. It would have been awfully difficult for the seven of us to make it out alive. The forty plus Umbra Lightning Condors were certainly something we weren’t able to handle…” Tu Ze said in a stern tone.

“Then what are we waiting for?” Zhuo Qian flung her marooned hair back, taking the initiative to rush back into Solitary Ridge, her figure robust like a female leopard. “Every bit of delay means every inch closer that little guy is to death. Since we have made our decision, we shouldn’t hesitate like a bunch of ladies!”

Agitated by her words, her previously cowardly comrades became ashamed, dashing after her with loud bellows.

Tu Ze rubbed his nose and stared at the bunch of guys that were acting like they were pumped up on steroids and cursed under his breath, ”Damn, seems like only Zhuo Qian is able to handle you bastards during critical moments!”

Many women were more collected than men when faced with danger. Zhuo Qian was precisely such a woman.

Previously, when she witnessed the Umbra Lightning Condors furiously hurling themselves at Qin Lie after being aggravated, she was struck dumb and didn’t had a chance to react.

However, she realized soon after that it could be their only chance to escape. Thus, she urged her partners to abandon him with a scream, dashing out of Solitary Ridge with their lives.

At that moment, she was fully convinced that Qin Lie would not escape death's grasp. Even if the group of seven had pulled out all the stops to help him, he would not be saved. In fact, it would be very likely that the seven of them would have joined his fate.

Hence, she decisively acted to urge her partners to leave.

Given the circumstances, there was doubt that the choice she made was the smartest. There was no way she would have known that Qin Lie was the perfect counter against the Umbra Lightning Condors.

She only started to question herself when she realized that they were no longer being chased by the condors. The suspicion that Qin Lie might still be alive flickered in her heart.

Eager to make amendments, she was the first to turn back without hesitation, hastily making her way back into Solitary Ridge.

"I hope it's not too late..."

Zhuo Qian thought darkly as she neared the danger zone, grasping her bow tightly in her nervousness.

Cutting through the dense trees, Zhuo Qian arrived at a deeper region of Solitary Ridge and desperately looked towards the place where they had escaped from prior.

Zhuo Qian screamed suddenly.

Tu Ze and the rest were following closely behind. Hearing her scream, their faces changed and they scrambled towards her.

They joined her with loud exclaims of their own…

They were greeted by the sight of Qin Lie in the middle of piles of Umbra Lightning Condor feathers and corpses. None of the corpses were whole; they were all torn into halves, evidently dying in a miserable fashion.

Qin Lie, who only received slight injuries, was squatting among them, harvesting the beast cores from their foreheads.

The group of seven stared in absolute astonishment. Their mouths were opened wide in their shock and their eyeballs were threatening to pop out of their sockets.

“Holy shit, am I seeing things?” The chubby Kang Zhi said while rubbing his eyes, staring at Qin Lie as though he was a monster. “Those were more than forty Umbra Lightning Condors! They all died? And they died this miserably?!”

Qin Lie lifted his head and spotted the returning group of people. He said with a smile, ”I have a spirit artifact on me which coincidentally made me immune to the lightning attacks. It definitely wasn’t because I had a high cultivation level.”

“F*ck, you lil’ brat, couldn’t you have mentioned it earlier?” Tu Ze stepped forward with big smiles and gave Qin Lie a friendly punch.

“Seriously…”

Qin Lie groaned to himself. Believing that they wouldn’t return, he had planned to harvest all the beast cores for himself after massacring the Umbra Lightning Condors.

——He was absolutely hoping to avoid any sorts of interaction with Tu Ze and his party..

“Well, I was afraid that my spirit artifact wouldn’t work. I didn’t wish to implicate you, which was why I didn’t say anything…” explained Qin Lie.

Since this wasn’t Ling Town, he didn’t have to act, so his demeanor was natural.

Not a trace of dullness could be seen in Qin Lie’s eyes. In fact, they were unusually active. Coupled with his pretty face, he was actually devilishly attractive.

“You’re too green, kid. Your lie wasn’t smooth enough. If you were indeed worried that your spirit artifact might fail you, would you really have dared to walk here into your death?” Zhuo Qian glanced at him and straightforwardly said, ”Your first action when

you arrived was to grab the beast cores. Just admit that you're greedy, there's no need to find other excuses. Seriously, you think we're the same as you? You thought we're going to fight over mere Rank One spirit beast cores with you?"

"Hahaha, we're from Nebula Pavilion. My name's Tu Ze, this sister here's called Zhuo Qian and that's Kang Zhi..." Tu Ze made simple introductions of his companions while laughing broadly. "We heard rumors that there were Stellar Iron in the proximity, hence we came to try our luck. Hehe, don't worry, we really do not care about those Rank One beast cores. Nobody's going to fight you for them..."

Qin Lie's heart trembled.

Rank One beast cores were definitely not luxurious goods. However, to the majority of all martial practitioners, the cores weren't cheap commodities either. At the very least, he knew that none of the Ling Family martial practitioners would be as uninterested as them.

Even though Tu Ze and the others hailed from Nebula Pavilion, they were still youths at the Refinement Realm. Their indifference towards the Rank One beast cores were enough evidence that the backgrounds of the group of seven were surely not simple.

Chapter 9: Assimilation

Solitary Ridge.

Qin Lie's haul was a total of forty-seven prismatic looking beast cores, plucked from the foreheads of the forty-seven Umbra Lightning Condors. Tu Ze's group of seven truly did not place those beast cores in their eyes. They just joked around with smiles as they watched him store the cores into a leather bag.

Dusk was approaching, yet none of them made to leave Solitary Ridge. They sat down in a circle at a dry clearing nearby.

If it was just Tu Ze's group of seven, they wouldn't have dared to stayed the night here. However, everything was different with the presence of Qin Lie. His ability to massacre flocks of Umbra Lightning Condors reassured them of their safety. They were not the slightest fearful of any potential attacks from more condors.

In fact, they were even hoping for the arrival of other condors so that they would be able to witness Qin Lie's methods up close, eager to see his mysterious spirit artifact in action.

They made a fire, set up some simple tents and seated themselves around the fire in a small circle. As for their food, they barbecued a dozen of wild hares and pheasants that were easily hunted. Cheer and laughter rang about as they indulged in hard liquor and merry making.

Far away from Ling Town and Herb Mountain, Qin Lie no longer

restrained himself. He reverted back into the boisterous, passionate youth that he really was, hitting it off with Tu Ze's group of seven in no time.

Everyone gradually loosened up after a couple mouthfuls of liquor. Qin Lie properly introduced himself, saying that his name was "Ling Lie", and that he was from Ling Town. He further explained that he came to the Arctic Mountain Range to polish his martial cultivation.

Upon hearing he was from Ling Town, Tu Ze brimmed with warmth and said with a smile, "Haha, we are all allies!"

At this, the remaining six people finally discarded all sense of wariness against him.

The Arctic Mountain Range spanned five hundred kilometers and was occupied by various distribution of powers. Nebula Pavilion was just one of the low level forces in the area. If Qin Lie was a martial practitioner from a rival force, it would definitely be inappropriate to interact so closely with him.

Different forces fought regularly over stuff like spirit ores, territories and cultivation hotspots. The skirmishes were bloody and they happened unceasingly year-round!

There were even some forces that became irreconcilable enemies because of that. If such enemies met, neither would rest until a side was annihilated. It was simply impossible for them to walk on the same road.

Even though this region had always been under the control of Nebula Pavilion, there was no guarantee that they wouldn't come across martial practitioners from foreign forces.

Therefore, when they were resting, Tu Ze's pressing concern was Qin Lie's identity. After knowing Qin Lie was from the Ling Family, he was completely relieved.

Nebula Pavilion was a martial force at the Limestone rank. Being a ranked force meant that even the weakest of them possessed a considerable level of foundation and strength.

The martial forces of Spirit Realm were graded in order of their strength. Starting from the lowest, the ranks were respectively Limestone, Black Iron, Copper, Silver, and Gold. Strict requirements were in place for each ranks, and the difference in strength between ranks were extremely significant.

The majority of martial practitioners belonging to forces at the Limestone rank were either at the Refinement or Natal Opening Realm. There were rarely any practitioners at the Manifestation Realm that would stay at such forces permanently.

Generally speaking, once a practitioner broke through to the Manifestation Realm, they would be recruited by Black Iron ranked forces, directly entering a whole new domain for martial practitioners.

As for Black Iron ranked forces, the majority of their martial

practitioners were at the Manifestation and Netherpassage Realms. When practitioners broke through to the Fulfillment Realm, they would similarly choose to enter Copper ranked forces to gain access to more resources in a bid to raise their cultivation levels at an even faster pace.

It was no different for the Copper, Silver and the legendary Gold ranked forces. They each accommodated to different cultivation rankings of martial practitioners.

A large portion of martial practitioners in Copper ranked forces were at the Fulfillment and Fragmentation Realms. Similarly, Silver ranked forces' practitioners were mostly at the Nirvana and Imperishable Realms. As for the legendary Gold ranked forces, they were viewed as the holy land of cultivation, consisting of top martial practitioner powerhouses at the Void and Genesis Realms.

Due to the distribution of power, most of the forces would usually choose to be backed by a higher ranked power, with dependents of a lower rank beneath them. This pyramid-like arrangement persisted throughout the rankings, keeping a balance between powers.

For example, while Nebula Pavilion relied on a higher ranked force, receiving both protection and restrains, it also had its own dependents... Ling Family and a few other minor forces were ruled by Nebula Pavilion, and they had to offer tributes yearly.

After they ate and drank their fill, the group of youths laid down lazily, stargazing through the dense forest canopy.

“It’s been three months already. If we still aren’t able to find the Stellar Iron, the only option left is to return.” Tu Ze exhaled audibly, ”Without the Stellar Iron, I can’t produce the kind of spirit artifact I want, sigh..”

“We can only leave such matters to luck. Just because others had managed to come across some Stellar Iron in this region does not guarantee that we will be able find some too. Ultimately, Stellar Iron is a Common Grade Seven artifact material, which is considered to be rare. For all you know, all of them had been harvested by the very same person who had come across it first. Why would any of it be left for us?” Zhuo Qian gallantly took a long draught from her wineskin, and commented somewhat irritably.

The harsh liquor made her luscious face flushed in an attractive bright shade of red. Her pair of sparkling eyes were half-closed as she reveled in the intoxication, looking extremely seductive. Kang Zhi and a few youths flickered about unceasingly, trying to sneak as many glances of her as they could.

Possibly due to the alcohol, Zhuo Qian paid no attention to her bearings. Her exquisite piece of body armor that featured two large, round indents was slightly cracked from the front, revealing a small portion of her soft, milk-like breasts, driving the heartbeats of Kang Zhi and the rest spiraling out of control.

“Stellar Iron...” whispered Qin Lie as he too, took a draught of the liquor. Retrieving the information from his memories, he said, ”After this Solitary Ridge, there’s a valley forty kilometers ahead.

In the middle of that valley is a lake, and at the bottom of the lake there might be some Stellar Iron."

"Who told you this?!" Tu Ze hurriedly stood up upon hearing this, appearing extremely excited. "Are you sure?"

"My grandpa was the one who told me this, so it shouldn't be wrong. However, I have yet to go there myself, so there are no guarantees from me." Qin Lie stated.

"This is definitely better than wandering about aimlessly!" Zhuo Qian's face lit up in joy as she tossed her wineskin to Qin Lie and spoke in a carefree manner: "I'll treat you to some liquor first. If we really manage to find some Stellar Iron, Big Brother Tu here will definitely not be stingy."

"Of course!" Tu Ze patted Qin Lie's shoulder heavily and said with a giant grin: "Lie boy here is our lucky star!"

"Drink, drink!" Kang Zhi and the rest cheered.

Qin Lie was startled as he held the wineskin in his hands. Catching the mischievous Zhuo Qian's mocking glances, he gallantly chugged at the liquor. For a moment, he could even smell a trace of a fragrant aroma that did not belong to the alcohol. He felt a gentle ripple stirred in his heart, as distracting thoughts surfaced involuntarily.

Noticing Qin Lie's expression, Zhuo Qian chuckled charmingly as

she gestured unrestrainedly, “You’re quite interesting! Hah, when we find the Stellar Iron, big sister here will treat you to another drink!”

“Sure.” Qin Lie replied between mouthfuls of liquor.

……

Tu Ze, Kang Zhi and the others fell soundly asleep, accompanied by their steady snoring through the otherwise silent night.

However, Qin Lie stayed beside the firepit. After some hesitation, he took out a piece of beast core and and began to play with it.

A Rank One Umbra Lightning Condor’s beast core was shaped like a prism and as thick as a thumb. Observing it closely, he could spot strands of electric currents flowing about actively within the blue, translucent core.

Closing his eyes, Qin Lie silently channeled Heavenly Thunder Eradication, and a force of attraction started to emit from his palm!

“Bzzt, bzzt, bzzt!”

Thin strands of electric currents spurred rapidly into motion, flowing into the meridians within his palm.

A faint feeling of numbness started to spread from his palm. He could tell clearly that those thin strands of electric currents were following the muscles and veins of his body, flowing downwards from his arms. They gathered like streams at his dantian's spirit sea.

Qin Lie was excited and overjoyed and the corner of his mouth moved upwards to reveal a large grin.

The dantian's spirit sea was located at the abdomen of the human body and is the core in which martial practitioners store their spirit energy. Similarly, a beast core was the source of energy for spirit beasts.

Martial practitioners cultivate by absorbing nature spirit energy and slowly infusing them into their dantian's spirit sea. By unceasingly pushing the boundaries of the dantian's spirit sea, they would be able to improve their spirit energy capacity, allowing the practitioners to wield stronger spirit powers.

Throughout these years, Qin Lie had amassed quite a bit of spirit energy himself. Previously, when he had borrowed the power of lightning from the Ninth Heavens to temper himself, he had also widened his spirit sea considerably.

However, the spirit energy that he painstakingly accumulated was always exhausted in just a single training. His spirit sea was regularly dried up and he frequently had no spirit energy to use.

The thickness and purity of the spirit energy within the dantian's

spirit sea was a good indicator of the cultivation level of a martial practitioner. The simplest way for Qin Lie to find out his level of cultivation would be to fill up his spirit sea to the brim with spirit energy first, and then measure it with a Realm Assessing Stone, which would provide him with a rough estimate for an answer.

The accumulation of one's own spirit energy was done by slowly gathering and refining the world's spirit energy. It wasn't meant to be accomplished overnight. However, there was always an exception to everything. Among the mysterious lands, there were some rare items that were able to greatly shorten the process needed to replenish the spirit energy within one's spirit sea.

Spirit stone, spirit crystals, spirit pills, spirit plants and suitable beast cores were able to speed up the accumulation of spirit energy, allowing martial practitioners to improve their cultivation rapidly.

Qin Lie focused his attention on the beast core in his hand, guiding the electric currents to flow through his muscles and veins into his body, allowing the energy to enter his dantian's spirit sea bit by bit. His dried up spirit sea gradually started to fill up...

"Crack!"

Having exhausted its energy, the beast core in his palm split open. Qin Lie jolted awake from the sound.

Contemplating inwardly, he realized that the power from one beast core would never allow his spirit sea to be filled in

abundance.

A large portion of the power from the beast core was wasted during the refinement process. Only an approximate of ten to twenty percent of its original spirit energy would be induced into his spirit sea.

Tilting his head upwards to look at the sky, he realized that unknowingly, dawn was already ushering in.

“Absorbing the energy from beast core actually took such a long time, and it was merely just a Rank One beast core. From the looks of it, I probably don’t have any time left to continue cultivating...”

With a deep sigh, Qin Lie closed his eyes in a bid to rest.

.....

The next day, after a night of rest, everybody appeared to be lively and refreshed.

“Ling Lie, you’re looking good! I didn’t expect you to recover so fast after killing so many Umbra Lightning Condors yesterday, not bad at all!” Kang Zhi exclaimed.

The rest of them immediately focused their attention on Qin Lie and discovered that his eyes were lively and his body radiated a bright glow of vigor.

Even the multiple shallow wounds he received from the condors had already started to scab. Others would find it difficult to believe he had fought a bloody battle just the day before.

“Really?” Qin Lie laughed. “It was probably due to the liquor and the comfortable sleep I had last night. All of you look energetic too.” He understood that it definitely was due to the partial replenishment of his spirit sea.

“Let’s go to the valley that Ling Lie mentioned and hope that we can really find some Stellar Iron. We’re almost out of time. Any further delays and our family back home will be seriously worried about us.” Tu Ze anxiously commented.

“Mn, if we can’t find it this time, we have to start going back.” Zhuo Qian nodded her head as she combed her naturally curly long hair. Smiling brightly at Qin Lie, she said, ”It all depends on whether your information is accurate.”

“I hope that it’s accurate too.” Frowning slightly, he added, “But that region isn’t very peaceful. If our luck is bad, we might encounter something we shouldn’t encounter and land ourselves in very big trouble.”

Chapter 10: Sixth Level Of Refinement!

“Encounter something we shouldn’t encounter? What are you referring to?”

Along the way towards the lake in the valley, Kang Zhi turned his head to ask as his chubby face revealed a bitter smile, his worry evident.

“Ice Soul Pythons!” Qin Lie kneaded his eyebrows and said, ”There are Ice Soul Pythons living in the vicinity of the lake. They will occasionally go to the lake to wash the mud off their bodies. If we unfortunately come across one of them, we’ll be in serious trouble.”

Ice Soul Pythons were Rank Two spirit beasts, with strength similar to martial practitioners at the Natal Opening Realm. Their combat prowess far outstripped the Umbra Lightning Condor. Martial practitioners at the Refinement Realm would find it very difficult to endure even a single breath of these serpents that were filled with frost energy.

Ling Family’s Ling Feng, together with Ling Chengzhi and some others, came across an Ice Soul Python a few years ago and got sprayed with a full breath of frost energy. Luckily, he blocked most of it with his Firecloud Hammer, if not, the frost energy would have invaded his heart and killed him.

In the end, he survived at the cost of his spirit artifact, the Firecloud Hammer. If Qin Shan hadn’t helped to repair the

hammer for him, it would have been scrap metal by now.

From this, one could see that Ice Soul Pythons were not easy to deal with.

Qin Lie carried with him a sculpture of his grandfather. According to his grandfather, the sculpture would be useful within the territories of some specific spirit beasts.

However, the Ice Soul Pythons were not included in the list of spirit beasts mentioned by his grandfather. Thus, the sculpture was of no help to him now.

Upon hearing the presence of Ice Soul Pythons, the expressions of the party changed slightly as fear grew within their hearts.

Other than Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, everyone revealed a face of reluctance. At this moment, Zhuo Qian addressed them coldly, ”Ice Soul Pythons are stronger than Umbra Lightning Condors. However, this particular spirit beast does not live in groups. We will likely come across them at most one at a time. Which is more troublesome, a single serpent, or over thirty Umbra Lightning Condors? We have seven of us, and if we count Ling Lie in, will we not win against a single Ice Soul Python? On top of that, it isn’t guaranteed that we might even meet one. Look at your own fearful appearances, don’t you people feel ashamed of yourself?”

After her speech, the group of people dryly laughed as they realized their behavior was truly lacking.

“Brother Lie, this matter is not your concern, you do not have to accompany us any further,” Tu Ze said suddenly as he exhaled deeply and continued, ”We’re already grateful that you gave the valuable information to us. There’s no reason to allow you to risk danger together with us. Mn, we can part here…”

“No, I’m coming along with you guys.” Qin Lie replied as he shook his head, revealing a look of calmness on his youthful face. “You need me to give you directions. Besides, I’m also going there to look for something…”

Stellar Iron was a Common Grade Seven spirit material. Legend has it that it came from meteorites created from the explosion of stars. Melting the Stellar Iron and imbuing it into spirit artifacts would greatly increase the artifacts’ toughness. The Stellar Iron was definitely considered to be a rare treasure.

However, the reason why his grandfather was affixed on that lake was not due to the Stellar Iron. It was because of the Ice Stalk Grass at the sides of the lake.

Ice Stalk Grass was a Common Grade Five spirit herb and also the main ingredient for refining the Hundred Vein Pill. The Hundred Vein Pill could be consumed to improve the tenacity of the muscles and veins within the body, and increase the speed at which spirit energy flowed along the meridians. This would allow martial practitioners to refine spirit stones and beast cores even faster.

Directly ingesting the Ice Stalk Grass could also give Qin Lie similar benefits, which would allow him to rapidly refine the lightning energy within the beast cores and quickly accumulate

more spirit energy.

He was willing to travel together to the lake precisely because of the Ice Stalk Grass. It definitely had nothing to do about caring for Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and the rest.

Besides, if he were to head towards the lake alone, he would be doomed the moment he came across an Ice Soul Python.

Without Tu Ze's group of seven, he certainly would not have attempted such a suicidal move at his level of cultivation. Therefore, when opportunity presented itself in the form of Tu Ze and the others, he definitely had to give it a try.

Tu Ze and company were moved by his act of "camaraderie", and they started to look at him with friendlier eyes.

They chatted along the way and under his guidance, the party of eight reached the valley at noon.

The Arctic Mountain Range had numerous identical valleys like this. This particular valley they had arrived at didn't have a name. Perhaps due to its proximity to the glacier region, it was considerably colder than Solitary Ridge as freezing wind blew harshly from within the valley.

They tightened their clothes and proceeded to open up a path through the knee-high vegetation with their weapons, making their way deeper into the valley.

As expected, they found a lake right in the middle of the valley. The sides of the lake were abundant in dense clusters of aquatic plants, and above its surface were thin layers of swirling fog. Enshrouded by the light blanketing vapor, the inner portion of the valley presented a uniquely beautiful and misty scenery.

“The Stellar Iron is at the bottom of this lake?” Tu Ze excitedly looked at Qin Lie, while asking for a final confirmation.

Qin Lie nodded.

Tu Ze yelled out in joy and directly jumped into the lake without hesitation.

“Ah! The water’s so damn cold!” Abruptly surfacing from the water with a drenched head, Tu Ze said as he heartily laughed out loud, ”Come on in and wash yourselves! After travelling within the mountains for so long, we have yet to see a lake with such clean water. We’d better not miss this chance.”

Being hygienic was a woman’s natural tendency. At this, even the usually casual Zhuo Qian could no longer hold herself in. With a charming smile, she gracefully dived into the lake.

The remaining six others were full of glee too. One by one, they rushed into the waters, hurriedly cleaning their bodies first before diving towards the bottom of the lake.

Qin Lie watched on for a while. After making sure they were busy searching for the Stellar Iron, he began to wade among the plants and stones at the side of the lake.

The length of a typical Ice Stalk Grass was only that of a human's forearm and half of it was usually rooted into the ground between pieces of rocks. Only a small portion of it would protrude above the water's surface and even then, it would usually grow in the midst of various common water grass and algaes, making it extremely hard to find.

Had Qin Lie not known in advance that there was Ice Stalk Grass to be found here thanks to his grandfather's map, even if he frequently passed through here, it would be highly improbable for him to discover its existence without carefully digging about the aquatic plants.

However, since he was certain that there was Ice Stalk Grass around here, the result would definitely be different.

Qin Lie steadily circled the shores of the lake, maintaining his calm as he meticulously searched...

Within minutes, a single stalk of a plain-looking grass came into the corner of his vision. Qin Lie's face shone with delight as he immediately made his way towards it, carefully plucking it from among a dense patch of aquatic vegetation.

The entire stalk of Ice Stalk Grass was retrieved. It was less than half a meter long and 2 fingers wide.

The leaves were olive in color and cold to the hands, with numerous fine veins on its surface. The pattern of the veins looked very similar to the meridians of a human body, looking as though it contained mysteries within.

“Common Grade Five……”

Qin Lie muttered under his breath. After tightly securing one end of the Ice Stalk Grass, he stored it in a leather bag at his waist and continued his search.

“Hahaha! I found it, I found a bit of Stellar Iron, it’s really here!”

Fatty Kang Zhi’s exhilarated laughters rang out from a corner of the lake. He held up a small piece of a shiny, silver stone fragment the size of a small fingernail and continuously waved it back and forth, pinched between his fingers

The piece of stone fragment shone brightly under the reflection of the sunlight like a rare metal, as though it really was a meteorite that came from the stars.

Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and others were still at the bottom of the lake when they heard his outburst of laughter. They broke through the surface of the lake to see Kang Zhi’s smug face as he started to brag that he was “favored by the gods”, a “child of nature” and other shameless claims.

They ignored Kang Zhi's infuriating choice of words as their passionate gazes convened on that small shiny fragment, then quickly broke out into loud cheers after which they resumed diving with renewed gusto.

Certain that the bottom of the lake indeed contained Stellar Iron, the group of seven started to act like they were injected with chicken blood. They searched furiously within the lake without pause, occasionally surfacing only when they absolutely had to catch their breath.

Qin Lie paid them no attention, solely focused on searching for more Ice Stalk Grass while conveniently on the lookout for unexpected dangers.

Five days passed in a blink of an eye.

In these five days, Qin Lie had harvested more than ten of those Ice Stalk Grass. Whenever night fell, he would refine the Umbra Lightning Condor beast cores after ingesting a stalk of the Ice Stalk Grass.

With the help of the Ice Stalk Grass, his speed of refining the cores were greatly increased. Within the span of five days, he refined more than twenty of those beast cores. The spiritual energy within his dantian's spirit sea started to slowly accumulate.

The feeling of having an abundance of spiritual energy, as though he possessed an incredible source of power within his body, greatly boosted his confidence.

Within these five days, Tu Ze's group of seven were also devoted to their goal of searching for Stellar Iron. It wasn't clear whether it was due to their unbelievably poor luck, but their total haul was relatively pitiful. There were only slightly more than ten small pieces of the Stellar Iron between them, far from meeting the required amount to refine Tu Ze's artifact.

In the middle of the night, after borrowing a Realm Assessing Stone from Tu Ze, he stealthily separated himself from the group to test his true cultivation rank.

The diamond-shaped Realm Assessing Stone was transparent like a crystal and sparkled faintly under the moonlight. It was specifically used to measure the cultivation rank of a martial practitioner.

Holding his breath, Qin Lie slowly gathered his spirit energy to the Realm Assessing Stone within his palm. A faint blue ray of light gradually appeared on the smoothest surface of the stone.

One ray of blue light represented one level of the Refinement Realm. Following the increased output of Qin Lie's spirit energy, the surface of the stone slowly emitted more rays of blue.

One ray, two rays, three, four, five, six rays!

Sixth level of Refinement!

“My spirit sea is still not fully filled yet. The number of rays should increase as I refine more of the beast cores. When my spiritual sea is truly filled to the brim with spirit energy, it might even reveal... that I have reached the seventh level of the Refinement Realm!”

Qin Lie breathed out slowly and cut off the infusion of Spirit Energy into the Realm Assessing Stone. His eyes started to glow faintly as he became filled with confidence and anticipation for the future.

On the sixth day, Tu Ze and the others resumed their search for more Stellar Iron while Qin Lie continued exploring the sides of the lake for more Ice Stalk Grass, just as they had previously done.

“Hiss! Hiss!”

Suddenly, the sound of a snake hissing echoed out from deep within the trees.

Qin Lie was searching within a large patch of seaweeds when his heart sank abruptly as he felt a heavy aura of chill closing in. Without hesitation, he fiercely lifted the largest boulder within reach and heavily tossed it into the lake, shouting out simultaneously, “There’s an Ice Soul Python!”

Whilst shouting, Qin Lie hurriedly moved to distance himself from the direction of the hissing, trying his best to avoid the scenario of coming face to face with the Ice Soul Python all alone.

Within the lake, Tu Ze and the others were alarmed by the sinking boulders and they raced towards the surface, sprinting towards Qin Lie when they spotted his beckoning hand.

The Ice Soul Python was an amphibious creature. Its combat prowess was exceedingly high on both land and in water. It was able to reveal its true strength even in the lake as it was unaffected by the water.

However, Tu Ze and the rest were unable to do the same.

If they tried to fight within the water, their strength would be greatly impacted; many of their strongest abilities would be heavily weakened.

Therefore, when they became aware that an Ice Soul Python was approaching, they decisively chose to make for land.

Knee-high vegetations were mangled as the group barged towards the trees; the sounds of twigs snapping, gravel scattering and the spirit beast's hissing as it slithered blended together.

Shortly after, with a body nearing nine meters in length and as thick as a bucket, a python came into their view.

There were several cloud-like patterns on the smooth body of the Ice Soul Python and its head was shaped like a triangle. White frosty mist would be spewed out between its breaths, capable of freezing one to the bones.

It slithered at a surprisingly fast speed and its body was exceptionally nimble, as some sort of a sinister glow faintly shone within its inky, dark green pupils.

“It’s here!” Kang Zhi shouted.

“Let’s kill it then!”

Zhuo Qian adjusted her stance and her healthy calves bent in a lunge position. She swiftly nocked an arrow, drawing her longbow back to be as taut as possible, becoming the first one to be ready for the impending battle.

Chapter 11: Shattered Ice Manor

“Swoosh!”

A silver arrow cut across the sky like a lightning bolt, quickly flying towards the Ice Soul Python.

When the arrowhead was about to pierce into the Ice Soul Python’s forehead, a silver light suddenly shone, and spirit energy was emitted outward. The deep-green eyes of the Ice Soul Python was dazzled by the radiant light, and it seemed to have temporarily lost its sight.

However, at this moment, it opened its mouth and spat out a mouthful of cold mist. The cold mist was mixed with shards of ice, landing straight on the arrowhead.

“Kling kling kling!”

As though it had been frozen, the fast-flying arrow actually emitted a heart-chilling sound, as it suddenly descended at flying speed.

“Slap!”

The Ice Soul Python swung its head to make a bash, and the arrow actually powerlessly fell aside. It did not cause any damage to it at all.

The lush-green little eyes of the enraged Ice Soul Python turned venomous and sinister. Spitting out its tongue, it blasted apart the surrounding bushes one after another as it madly pounced towards them.

“Watch out!” Zhuo Qian cried out. As she shot out another silver arrow, she roared. “Slaughter it with our combined strength!”

Tu Ze, Kang Zhi and everyone else made their moves one after another.

A crimson blade-beam, like a long, flying arc, exploded from the long saber in Tu Ze’s hands, smashing towards the oncoming Ice Soul Python.

Kang Zhi wailed out strangely, as sharp golden energy rampantly charged out from his long golden spear, brightly emitting streams of golden spear silhouettes that were aimed at the eyes of the Ice Soul Python.

The other four people had all gathered their concentration as well. Circulating their spirit energy and spirit arts, as wind blades, light waves, and fire balls struck towards its two flanks, coordinating with Tu Ze and the two others with their full strength.

Only Qin Lie stayed unmoving at his original position.

According to their several days of discussion, he knew that Tu Ze

was currently at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, and was only a step away from breaking through into the Natal Opening Realm. Zhuo Qian and Kang Zhi were both at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm; the proficiency of their skills were superb, and their battle experience was extremely bountiful as well.

The remaining four people were all at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, and could also be considered as very outstanding juniors in the Nebula Pavilion.

One at the ninth level, two at the eighth level, and four at the seventh level. With this amount of strength working together to go against the Ice Soul Python, a Rank Two spirit beast, as long as they stay focused and wary, it was possible for them to kill it.

Not counting the previous battle with the Umbra Lightning Condor, this time could possibly be Qin Lie's very first battle in its truest sense. Hence, he wanted to first observe the battle tactics which Tu Ze and the rest had, before joining into the fray.

Tu Ze and Kang Zhi, wielding their long saber and long spear in their hands, restricted the Ice Soul Python with head-on confrontations. As for Zhuo Qian, she pulled away a far distance and shot arrows at unexpected moments. Adding the other four people pincering from the two sides, that Ice Soul Python was evidently finding it extremely difficult to cope.

It could only constantly spew out the cold mist which was mixed with scraps of ice shards, in order to barely resist under the seven people's siege.

The Ice Soul Python's strongest attack was the ice mist from its mouth. If a martial practitioner were to be struck by it, his entire body would immediately turn frozen stiff, instantly losing his battle strength. If his body were to be invaded by the cold poison, his life might even be at stake.

Tu Ze and the rest deeply knew how frightening the Ice Soul Python could be, and all of them were maintaining a sufficient distance away from it. The moment they saw that it was about to spit out the cold mist, they would instantly choose to avoid it. As they definitely would not clash head-on with the cold mist, they prevented the Ice Soul Python's strongest attack from being effective every single time.

Among them, Zhuo Qian and a few others would take these opportunate moments to attack. Being struck several times by arrowheads, wind blades, fireballs, and light waves, the surface of the Ice Soul Python's upper body began to gradually exhibit trails of blood. From its winding movements, its figure was gradually losing its dexterity as well. Clearly, its speed was cumbered by its injuries.

Qin Lie attentively spectated from the side. Through the battle by Tu Ze and the rest, he learned several things.

It shouldn't be merely one or two days since Tu Ze and the other six began battling shoulder-to-shoulder. Their battle roles were clearly distinguished, and they were very familiar with their coordination. Furthermore, not only were they extremely united, their attacking methods were very intuitive as well.

With their Refinement Realm cultivation levels, under their collaborative effort, the seven of them completely wore out the Ice Soul Python with brute force. The injuries on the python's body continued to increase, and it gradually lost its ability to retaliate.

Anxiety was quickly lost in the battle. After the seven slowly and gradually wore it down, the Ice Soul Python's injuries were too severe, and its movements began to slow down. Finally, it lost the battle of attrition to the seven people.

"Haah. Such a waste of the python's skin. The skin of a Rank Two spirit beast carries a certain value after all."

With an aching heart, Kang Zhi stepped forward. Along with Tu Ze, he took out a small bottle, and the two of them poured out a type of liquid from the bottle onto the body of the Ice Soul Python in an even manner.

"Sssss!"

The corpse of the Ice Soul Python emitted a dense smoke, as its blood and meat began to melt at high speed, causing Qin Lie's heart to jolt from watching this scene.

Not long later, this nine-meter long Ice Soul Python had actually melted into a puddle of blood. What remained were the python's skin which was filled with many holes, the python's skeleton, the beast core, and two rows of sharp teeth.

Evidently, the parts which were not melted, were the materials from the Ice Soul Python that were truly worth a sum of money.

"Twerp, you're slacking, aren't you? We had such an intense battle, yet you were just watching from the sidelines?" Tu Ze smiled, and he did not have the slightest bit of intent to criticize him at all. "Could it be that you realized we were not in any danger, and were able to easily defeat the Ice Soul Python, hence you felt that there wasn't a need for you to step in?"

With the precedence of Qin Lie taking on more than forty Umbra Lightning Condors alone back then, none of the seven of them would feel that he was timid and afraid to act. They simply took it as though he was watching from the sidelines because victory was already in their grasps, and hence, decided to slack off.

"I have too little experience, so I wish to study your battle methods. And, the seven of you are too well-coordinated, so I was afraid that my participation would negatively affect you people instead," Qin Lie casually said.

"Haha, you're too modest. With the ability to kill more than forty Umbra Lightning Condors, how could your battle experience possibly be little?" Tu Ze invited him over, and pointed to the materials on the ground. With a prideful tone, he said, "I said this before. If you're truly able to find Stellar Iron, I will definitely thank you well. Among these python's skin, skull, teeth, and beast core, you can pick out any of them!"

Zhuo Qian, Kang Zhi, and the rest were all smiling, as they did not mind Tu Ze's decision at all.

Qin Lie lowered his head to take a look, before he shook his head and said with a smile, "It's fine. There isn't a spirit material that I need, so I won't take them."

"Swoosh! Swoosh swoosh! Swoosh swoosh swoosh!"

The sharp sounds of arrows piercing through the skies, suddenly came from the bushes. One arrow after another flew out, and their targets were clearly Tu Ze and his followers.

"Pwack!"

Chu Peng, who was next to Kang Zhi, was struck in the left shoulder by an arrow before he could even react. He staggered a few steps back from the arrow's penetrative strength, and he screamed out from the intense pain.

Before Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian could even have the time to store the spirit materials from the Ice Soul Python, their eyes instantly reddened, as they greeted the battle with furious roars.

Qin Lie's expression turned suddenly turned into fright. As he saw the arrows shooting through the sky, he immediately retreated and searched for a rock to hide.

Luckily, he had wandered around the lake for a few days and was

rather familiar with the surroundings. He immediately found a pile of rocks and shouted for Tu Ze and his gang to come over.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian swung their swords to break the incoming arrows while shielding Chu Peng and the injured Han Feng. They swiftly ran in Qin Lie's direction.

Then, a group of of more than ten martial practitioners dressed in dark brown gradually appeared from the bushes.

Among the group, some of them wielded a longbow. Their gazes were sharp as they were continuously shooting their arrows despite their quick movement, with a look as though they had wanted to kill everyone present.

Behind the archers, a silver-haired youth that had a cold expression looked towards Tu Ze and his gang ominously.

The man was also dressed in a dark brown robe and there was a shattered ice design embroidered on the left side of his chest. It looked like it was a special symbol for some sort of force.

"Shattered Ice Manor! Yan Ziqian!"

Zhuo Qian, who was finally under the cover of some rocks, saw that some people had surfaced from the lake, and gritted her teeth so tightly that it was constantly producing a grinding sound. This caused her charming face to reveal an expression of monstrous rage.

“It’s indeed the scoundrels from Shattered Ice Manor!”

Tu Ze placed the injured Chu Peng, Han Feng and others down properly as his face darkened He then wielded his long saber and looked like he was about to rush out to fight in desperation.

“Big Brother Tu, don’t be rash! Wait for them to come closer. We’re too far away at the moment, and are still in the effective radius of the archers!” Zhuo Qian frantically stopped him.

Tu Ze quickly calmed down. Breathing in deeply, he hid behind the pile of rocks and slowly calmed his breathing in preparation for the imminent bloody battle.

Hearing the name Shattered Ice Manor, Qin Lie knew that this battle was going to be unavoidable.

When he was in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, he could still hear the conversations of the people around him. All these years while he was in the Ling Family’s Dining Hall, he heard more than once about the strength of this power.

Like Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor was a Limestone rank power as well, and together with Nebula Pavilion, it was situated in Icestone City.

The entire Icestone City was under the control of the two powers, Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor, and these two forces

were under the control of the Black Iron ranked force “Dark Asura Hall”. Therefore, logically speaking, Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor should be under the restriction of “Dark Asura Hall” and should get along fine.

However, this was not the case.

For some unknown reason, these two powers acted like fire and water within Icestone City. Whether it was in the open or in the dark, they had never stopped fighting. When they were in Icestone City, the two forces would still hold back a little as they instructed their men to not be too overboard.

However, once they left Icestone City, whenever these two powers crossed path, a bloody battle was bound to ensue and many people died as a result.

Gradually, the two powers’ hatred became stronger and stronger. If it weren’t for “Dark Asura Hall’s” numerous warnings, the two parties would have probably begun a large-scale fight within Icestone City.

Shattered Ice Manor, which was similarly located within Icestone City, was quite near to the Arctic Mountain Range; hence, many martial practitioners often came to the Arctic Mountain Range for training. Every time the martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion crossed paths, it ended up in a bloodbath.

Even the small powers that were under Nebula Pavilion and

Shattered Ice Manor would often be in fights due to their higher powers' conflicts, and many people would die in the midst of those fights as well.

"Tu Ze, don't hide there like a dead dog, hurry up and come out!" The silver-haired youth who was wearing a cold expression walked forward and coldly said in a sinister tone, "I've been chasing this Ice Soul Python for six days and have expanded quite a lot of energy. Now you want to take advantage of it. Have you asked the Ice Drake Sword in my hands?"

As he spoke, he drew out snow white longsword that was as beautiful as the autumn waters. It was two fingers thick and shimmered with a cold glow.

On the sword, there was a silvery line of ice, and as the sword was swung, the silvery line of ice seemed to twist like a serpent. Upon closer inspection, it looked as though a serpent dragon was sealed there.

Beside them, a youth from Shattered Ice Manor had gathered the skin, bones, teeth and core of the Ice Soul Python, handed them to him respectfully, and said, "Young Manor Lord, other than a few holes in the skin, the rest are undamaged."

"Mn, looks like we have to thank them." Yan Ziqian nodded and looked at him, hinting at him to properly put it away.

Tu Ze and his gang hid behind the pile of rocks. With their own eyes, they saw the people from Shattered Ice Manor collect their

spoils of war while insulting them outloud in the process. This caused that to nearly explode with rage.

However, the bows of the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor were still pointing towards them, which prevented them from acting rashly.

“Wait! Wait for them to come closer. Wait for the bows to lose their effectiveness!” Zhuo Qian said coldly.

Everyone gritted their teeth as the nodded in acknowledgement. They held their weapons tightly as they quietly anticipated the enemy’s approach.

During the thunderstorm season, the weather was unpredictable. Initially, the sun was still shining brightly, but now, it was gradually getting dark as thick black clouds started to gather. To them, this gave off a pressure similar to the people from Shattered Ice Manor, which was a feeling of unhappiness and annoyance.

“Brother Lie, act accordingly later. If you see that the situation is dire, you… escape when you get the chance. Don’t worry about us,” Tu Ze whispered.

Qin Lie looked at him in shock before revealing a smile as he replied, “The Ling Family and Nebula Pavilion are affiliated.”

Once he said that, all of them looked a bit moved. Tu Ze’s eyes shined as a sense of pride welled up within him. Before the big

battle, he clenched his fist and thumped Qin Lie's chest.

Nothing else needed to be said.

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Chapter 12: Thunderous Fury

Dark clouds loomed, the atmosphere was stifling as the gale wind howled.

Under Yan Ziqian's signal, Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners did not hurriedly swarm in, and instead dispersed orderly in a semi-circular fashion, drawing closer bit by bit to the boulder pile where everyone was hiding.

Zhou Qian's charming face abruptly changed in expression, as she shouted: "Shit!"

Figured out Yan Ziqian's intentions, Tu Ze and others also went pale all of a sudden, as they thought "not good" to themselves.

With those archers aimed at them, if everyone tried to break through, they would become live targets. Yan Ziqian saw through their disadvantage, and did not rush straight over in a hurry, and instead dispersed, enclosing them in.

Such an act was intended to eliminate every single one of them at once!

Once the encirclement formed, to fight against higher numbers with seven people on top of having injured comrades, this battle would probably end in a miserable conclusion of total annihilation.

"Archers didn't come close, and it's too late to break through

now. This battle... the odds are grim!" Tu Ze suddenly took in a deep breath, his expression ferocious, his eyes reddened like a trapped beast that was about to put up a desperate fight. He roared lowly: "We can't get out of this now! Kill as many of them as possible at all costs, as long as we kill eight of them, it'll be worth it!"

The eyes of Kang Zhi, Zhuo Qian, Chu Peng and the rest were dyed red the instant they heard this speech, and also decided to put up a desperate fight.

There were a total of seventeen or eighteen people from Shattered Ice Manor, more than double their numbers. That Yan Ziqian's realm aura wasn't the slightest bit inferior to Tu Ze, and the few martial practitioners beside him also had auras as profound as the abyss. From the malevolence and ferociousness in their eyes, one could tell that every single one of them had gone through the baptism of blood.

Tu Ze, Kang Zhi and everyone else had wrestled with the Ice Soul Python for a long time, much of their spirit energy was spent; furthermore, three were injured by sneak attacks...

Qin Lie's brows tightly knitted as the brilliance of lightning faintly shot across his eyes. When Tu Ze and everyone else had already despaired, he was still trying his best to find a wisp of opportunity for triumph.

"Boooom!"

Suddenly at this moment, a rumbling sound of thunder in the sky exploded within the depth of the thick black clouds.

An marvelous glint instantly bursted from Qin Lie's eyes.

"In a little bit, all of you try to stay further away from me as much as possible. By all means, do not approach near me!"

Taking in a deep breath, an imposing atmosphere that made one shudder flooded out from Qin Lie's body, as though a sharp sword that had been covered in dust for many years, was about to reveal its unparalleled cutting edge.

The group of seven had on an astounded expression.

"Leave none alive! Kill!"

Yan Ziqian's callous shout also abruptly sounded at this moment. The martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor who had been holding their energy to spring into action loudly roared and assaulted from three directions.

Yan Ziqian who was at the ninth level of Refinement took the initiative, and rushed in first as the lead. The Ice Drake Sword in his hand shook, and a stroke of cold light violently shot out like a stretch of silk, as though a hornless dragon that had hibernated for far too long was pouncing over toward Tu Ze's front.

"Been waiting for that!"

Tu Ze explosively roared. The crimson longblade in his hand beamed with light, as he rushed out with large strikes, taking the lead and wrestling together with Yan Ziqian.

Zhuo Qian had tossed her curved bow long ago, her right hand tightly clutching a dark red colored Dragon Bone Whip. Her jade arm shook, and whip mirages as far as one's eyes could see wriggled like snakes, letting out ear-piercing whistles.

Kang Zhi and the injured Chu Peng, Han Feng and others, also revealed franticness on their faces, and rushed out without caring for their lives.

In the outer encirclement, the several archers of Shattered Ice Manor unceasingly adjusted the arrow's aim, but because Yan Ziqian, Tu Ze and others had already fiercely fought into close quarters, they, who were in fear of accidentally injuring their own, did not dare to shoot their arrows for a long time.

One of the archers suddenly cried out quietly, and saw Qin Lie, who was behind the pile of boulders.

He coldly sneered, raised his bow, aimed at Qin Lie, and shouted: "There's one left out alone!"

"Swoosh swoosh!"

Two unsuspecting arrows were instantly shot toward Qin Lie without mercy.

Channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, Qin Lie's mind shook with a loud rumble. The hot blood in his body seemed to have ignited, and his limbs and skeleton seemed to be flooded by the incredible might of violent thunder.

"Rrrrmm!"

The divine thunder of the Ninth Heaven appeared to have reached a resonance with him at this moment. Streaks of lightning wreck havoc in the skies like berserking dragons, slitheringly broke through heavy layers of clouds, and spiraled down as though it wished to sweep clean all sins of the mortal realm.

Following the thunder's fury, Qin Lie lowly roared, and disappeared in a flash like a blinding lightning ripping through the air.

"Where'd he go?"

The archer's vision temporarily went haywire from the lightning, and after he regained his senses, he discovered that Qin Lie's silhouette had already vanished. The two unsuspecting arrows that were shot out had also lost their traces.

"B-Behind you! Ahh, he's behind you!"

Another archer suddenly screamed involuntarily as though he saw a ghost in broad daylight; his face was filled with terror and

anxiety.

He saw the suddenly appearing Qin Lie, whose body was filled with dense lightning arcs. Those lightning wrapped around his body like snakes, while pillars of thick thunderous lightning hovered above his head like gigantic dragons.

The current Qie Lie seemed to have become the embodiment of a child of the thunder god!

“First!”

Qin Lie explosively roared. His hands wrapped densely with lightning suddenly caught onto this person’s neck, and constricted tightly with force!

“SNAP!”

The absolutely horrifying sound of a neck being crushed into pieces resounded sharply and clearly. The archer took his last breath on the spot!

Qin Lie who had killed someone for the first time, did not feel the slightest bit of fear, his hands did not shiver in the slightest. On that handsome little face, an excitement that made one’s heart shudder had actually emerged, as his eyes suddenly revealed ferociousness and lunacy.

It was as if his true nature, the lunatic and violent trait that had

been hidden for many years, was entirely aroused by today's battle.

"You are second!" He looked at the archer across from him, and suddenly grinned.

The archer who had screamed out to notify his companion only felt his spine chilling down by that smile, and birthed a feeling of despair, as though he was marked by a ferocious beast of ancient times.

"Zzzt Zzzt Zzzt!"

Streaks after streaks of lightning shot down from the rolling dark clouds, and they all struck down onto Qin Lie's surroundings.

As though carrying the thunder and lightning that filled with skies with him, Qin Lie suddenly rushed toward this archer. Amidst the thunderous rolls, that archer's eyes suddenly went blank.

He heard the genuine explosive sounds of thunder!

The deafening sound of thunder seemed to have exploded inside his mind, jolted him dumb and dazzled, unaware of where he was at.

"SNAP!"

With the same method, Qin Lie squeezed this person's neck into pieces. Before the archer fell onto the ground, his neck was charred a charcoal black.

Consecutively killed two people. The fierce blood inside Qin Lie's body ignited in its entirety. He didn't join the battle between Tu Ze and Yan Ziqian, and instead assaulted and killed the outer Shattered Ice Manor archers.

Anywhere Qin Lie passed, thunder would roar. Streaks of thick and long lightning akin to gigantic chains, could zigzag and twist as though being lead on by him.

Momentarily, those archers of Shattered Ice Manor uttered dreary wails and howls. If he came close to them, they would be struck by thunderous lightning even without him taking any actions.

Zhu Qian suddenly cried out in astonishment. She held the Dragon Bone Whip in her hands, the leather armor in front of her chest split apart, as pearls of blood seeped out of her fair skin. Her healthy and fit left leg also had a long, narrow wound.

"Quick, look at Ling Lie's side!" Zhuo Qian came to a realization. While deep within desperate straits, her charming eyes suddenly shone with a brilliant glint that attracted another's heart, as she crazily shouted toward Tu Ze and others.

Tu Ze's long hair was covered in frost, his teeth jittering.

Permeated by Ice Drake Sword's cold energy, his body slowly turned rigid.

Kang Zhi's abdominal region was penetrated through, as fresh blood surged out non stop. His chubby face twisted, as he uttered bloodcurdling shrieks again and again.

Chu Peng, Han Feng and others were moreso riddled with wounds, biting their teeth with a posture of mutual destruction, despairingly preparing to drag a few more down to hell with them.

Hearing Zhuo Qian's shouts, everyone looked at the place Qin Lie was in passing...

Only to see that most of those archers who made their spine run cold, was actually lying inside the shrubs with charred black bodies. Each one of their eyes bulged out, evidently having been killed.

The cause of these, Qin Lie, was like a deity who wielded the thunder of the Ninth Heaven. Blasts of thunder unceasingly bursted above his head, streaks of long and thick lightning roamed about beside him, like chains tethered up the sky.

The remaining three archers were forced to scuttle wildly by him. Continuously being struck by thunder and lightning, smoke arose from all of their bodies, the chance of being blasted dead by the heavenly thunder was possible any time.

After a slight astonishment upon suddenly seeing such a strange sight, Zhuo Qian and Tu Ze who were in a desperate state, had all of their spirit risen by a hundredfold, as though they once again obtained blessings of miraculous strength, and crazily fought together with Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners while madly shouting.

"Who's this guy?" Yan Ziqian's expression was stern, as he suddenly shouted coldly: "Two of you head there!"

Two martial practitioners who were besieging Tu Ze quickly moved away hearing what was said, and swept toward Qin Lie's direction.

The pressure on Tu Ze suddenly became lighter.

"Two's not enough! Send a few more over here!" Qin Lie uncannily grinned toward Yan Ziqian amidst the rolling thunder, then suddenly roared loudly: "Blast them! Keep blasting them!"

The downpouring rainstorm surged down, as the thunderous lightning of this valley's skies moved to answer his voice, distinctively gathering toward his position.

Everyone looked at the sky. They could clearly see the lightning arcs swimming around, gathering from the surroundings to above Qin Lie's head. Such a strange and terrifying scene caused them to feel their hearts turn cold and their guts to turn timid, birthing a dispiriting sense of an inability to defeat the enemy.

The two martial practitioners who left from Yan Ziqian's side, were struck by the thunderous lightning beside Qin Lie before they even neared him. Their steps both staggered, as though they were drunk, as thick smoke rose from their hair.

"Told you that it's far from enough!"

Qin Lie closed in while wildly laughing. Taking advantage of the two being out of their minds, he picked up a frost sword and stabbed out a few holes on the two's bodies before Yan Ziqian, Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian and other's faces.

One of them was precisely that person who plundered the spoils of war. As he fell down while screaming miserably, the leather bag on his waist loosened and fell, while the Ice Soul Python's beast core fell out.

Not taking an extra glance at the beast core, Qin Lie's eyes were fierce, as he walked toward Yan Ziqian and others in long strides with an extremely imposing manner.

In the wake of the numerous archers being killed, with two high rank martial practitioners instantly dying, in addition to that ferocious and imposing attitude of Qin Lie akin to that of the thunder god, every single one of Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners turned pale.

Under the boundless torrential rainstorm, they all hatched a sense of dread which told them that they were incapable of fighting Qin Lie. The moment they saw him walking closer, they

unconsciously stepped backwards.

As for Tu Ze and others, they were uttering strange roars. They, who came back from death's door, even had their vigor returning.

"Retreat!"

Being forced without a better option, Yan Ziqian clenched his teeth, and ordered everyone to immediately disengage.

The martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor seemed to have all been waiting for these words of his. The moment his voice fell, they eagerly fled in all directions. Those figures shuffled between the shrubbery, and then vanished soon after.

Tu Ze and rest didn't dare to chase, and hurriedly gathered together, rushing toward Qin Lie with excited expressions.

"Don't come!" Qin Lie hurriedly shouted loudly, "The thunder and lightning in the sky can't be held back!"

The moment these words were spoken, Zhuo Qian and the others paled in shock, then stopped in their tracks one by one. All of them looked at him with a strange expression.

Qin Lie, who hurriedly stopped channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, instantly felt his entire body aching and powerless as he stopped his art; he also felt a sense of dizziness. Those dense current on his limbs and bones, caused him to jolt from

stimulation, looking a sorry figure as well.

The moment Heavenly Thunder Eradication stopped, the thunder and lightning which gathered above his head, sure enough, dispersed magically.

“Ling Lie! As long as I, Tu Ze, am still breathing, you will be my good brother forever!”

“And I, Kang Zhi!”

“And me!”

The other few echoed in succession.

……

Chapter 13: Windfall!

Qin Lie laid on the ground with his whole body numb and lightning still flowing in his muscles and veins.

His true realm was only at the sixth level of Refinement. If it wasn't for the power of thunder from the Ninth Heaven, it wouldn't have been possible for him to achieve such shocking results.

Just from the martial practitioners who came from Yan Ziqian's side, if any of them truly had the intent to kill him, it would've been difficult for him to win.

Once the vicious battle ended, the thunder scattered. Because he had used too much strength with his lightning strikes, his mind immediately weakened.

Tu Ze's group of seven came up to him and were clicking their tongues with surprise. The look in their eyes caused him to feel uneasy from the bottom of his heart.

"Brother Lie, what just happened?" Kang Zhi's chubby face was squished together, and he was laughing, abnormally flatteringly. "It seemed like you caused the thunder and lightning in the sky? How did you do it? This guy, you're normally as delicate as a girl, but once you started battling, it's as if you're a completely different person. Your murderous intent was so wrathful and vicious, even I was scared just from watching you. You really have your own way of doing things!"

“It was all thanks to the spirit artifact.” Qin Lie’s face was weak, and he didn’t care how curious they were. He simply took out a piece of the Umbra Lightning Condor’s beast core, narrowed his eyes, and started regulating his breathing.

Tu Ze and the others, upon seeing him like this, stopped questioning him and all sat by his side, taking out some spirit pills to heal themselves.

After a while.

Qin Lie felt like his strength was gradually coming back. He heard Tu Ze and the others chattering and slowly opened his eyes.

“Just about time you woke up.” Tu Ze grinned, casually threw him a jade tablet, and said, “Mn, this jade tablet is for you. With this jade tablet, you can come to Nebula Pavilion anytime, and become a core member of Nebula Pavilion.”

He picked up the jade tablet. Seeing that there was a nebula cloud design on it, Qin Lie was a bit stunned, “This…”

He knew that becoming a part of the Limestone ranked force, a core Nebula Pavilion member, was something very difficult. The Ling Family and the children of other forces all desperately cultivated just to become one of the core members of Nebula Pavilion. They did that for the sake of breaking through into the Natal Opening Realm before they turned twenty, to get Nebula Pavilion’s favor.

The brothers Ling Chengzhi and Ling Chengye, had reached the Natal Opening Realm, but unfortunately they were limited by their age and couldn't enter Nebula Pavilion. They could only exist as martial practitioners of vassal forces.

Of the large Ling Family, only Ling Xuanxuan had a chance at entering the Natal Opening Realm before twenty years of age to carry on and enter Nebula Pavilion for cultivation.

Tu Ze threw out the command token and made it clear that he could use it to become a core member at anytime. This greatly shocked Qin Lie.

"The command token is only one of the things." Zhuo Qian smiled sweetly, threw him a wineskin, and continued on with a smile, "I told you that if you find the Stellar Iron, I'll treat you to a drink..."

Before Qin Lie could say anything, she spoke again, "We've just finished calculating. You killed seven archers from Shattered Ice Manor alone, and those seven people were all at the fifth level of Refinement. Of the two that you killed after that, one was at the seventh level, and the other was at the eighth level. Mn, seven level fives counts as fifty contribution points, a level seven counts as eighty contribution points, and a level eight count as a hundred contribution points. Adding the Ice Soul Python materials that you retrieved, that all totals to three hundred fifty contribution points..."

Zhuo Qian's voice paused, and her smile became even more brighter and wider. "You haven't even entered Nebula Pavilion, and you've already won eight hundred and eighty contribution points, hehe, with that many contribution points, as soon as you come over, you can exchange it for a lot of things."

Tu Ze and the others were all smiling.

Qin Lie felt a bit confused and asked, "Contribution points? There's contribution points for killing people?"

"Contribution points is a common thing that the core members of Nebula Pavilion use, it can be used to exchange cultivating items such as spirit arts, spirit skills, spirit artifacts, spirit pills, and more from the pavilion. There are many ways to receive contribution points. As long as you contribute to Nebula Pavilion, you can get a corresponding amount of contribution points. You can get contribution points from capturing and killing spirit beasts, turning in spirit materials, and helping the pavilion with gathering specific items. Killing an enemy of Nebula Pavilion naturally can also earn you contribution points..."

Tu Ze grinned with his mouth opened wide and explained to him in detail, "Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion have always endlessly fought bloody battles. Because of Dark Asura Hall's restrictions, killing martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor doesn't officially earn you contribution points, but unofficially the pavilion will still give additional contribution points. Today you've killed nine people. We had already calculated for you, and we will report it for you, including the materials from the Ice Soul Python. Hehe, you haven't even been to Nebula Pavilion, and you have

already received a windfall."

"You guys were the ones who killed the Ice Soul Python, so it shouldn't it be your contribution points, not mine?" Qin Lie asked in surprise.

"We weren't able to save it ourselves, and in the end, you were the one who got it back, so naturally it counts as yours. Mn, all seven of us have no objections. Say no more, we said it's yours, so it's yours!" replied Tu Ze as he waved his hand.

Qin Lie nodded his head and stopped being courteous. "Then thank you."

"Haha! Good brother!" Tu Ze laughed loudly.

"There's more!" Fatty Kang Zhi was smiling as he threw Qin Lie a leather bag. The leather bag was bloated, and it seemed like there were many things within.

"We thoroughly searched just now, and found some cultivating materials that might be somewhat useful to you from the nine people of Shattered Ice Manor that you killed. Hehe, they're all just things like spirit pills and spirit stones. Mn, the weapons and spirit artifacts on them aren't really of high quality; they're also very large, and not convenient to carry. It might not suit you, so we didn't tidy it up for you. But after we go back to the pavilion, we'll still help you exchange it into corresponding contribution points," Kang Zhi explained.

Qin Lie weighed the leather bag in his hands, revealed a pleasantly surprised expression in his eyes, and thanked them once again.

The three days after that, everyone first healed their injuries near the lake. When Qin Lie felt that his spirit energy was more fully replenished, he lightly sparred with Chu Peng, who was at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, without the help of the power of the lighting from the Ninth Heaven to learn from each other.

He, whose true level was at the sixth level of Refinement, didn't have an obvious disadvantage in his match against Chu Peng.

His level was slightly lower, but because his body was tough, along with the fact that he used lightning and thunder in his strikes, it limited Chu Peng a lot. Even though Chu Peng was an entire level above him, Chu Peng couldn't get any advantage over him.

"The spirit art you have cultivated is very strange. If you find a suitable spirit artifact to coordinate with it, your power will certainly become very terrifying." Watching the two of them battle, Tu Ze scratched his chin and said, "After we return, I'll head to the pavilion's Spirit Artifact Armory and try to find one for you. Hopefully, I can find a spirit artifact that can increase your battle strength."

Qin Lie smiled. Because Chu Peng was injured, he didn't use all of his power, so he felt that his body's strength could very possibly exceed Chu Peng's by a lot!

Of course, he didn't completely reveal it. Privately, he felt that if he used his full strength instead of the lightning, he should be able to compete against Kang Zhi, who was in eighth level of Refinement.

"It's impossible for Yan Ziqian to have brought too many people to the Arctic Mountain Range, and this time he suffered a loss. According to his cautious personality, without a complete certainty, he shouldn't come and risk himself again. Mn, let's stay for a couple more days and see if we can get some more Stellar Iron. Brother Lie, are you coming back to Nebula Pavilion with us?

"No, I still have to go back to the Ling Family," Qin Lie rejected. Now was the time when lightning strikes occurred frequently. He still needed to rely on the special environment within Herb Mountain to continue to cultivate his Heavenly Thunder Eradication, so he apologized and said, "Big Brother Tu, since you have all pretty much recovered already, I'll leave first. Until next time."

Even though Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian tried their best to keep him with them, Qin Lie was determined to leave first, so the seven of them couldn't do anything but watch him leave regretfully.

After Qin Lie left, Tu Ze and the others still stayed by the lake and continued to work hard for the Stellar Iron.

Ling Town, at dusk.

“Almost half a month has passed and Qin Lie still hasn’t showed up. Looks like he really was in an accident,” Ling Chengzhi said with creased brows. He was in the town’s martial arts arena, sitting on the spectator’s seats and looking at the Ling Family youths below.

Beside him was Ling Family’s Patriarch Ling Chengye and Ling Yushi.

Ling Xuanxuan was wearing a fiery tassel short skirt, standing in the middle of the martial arts arena in a neat and relaxed manner and yelling at the Ling Family’s martial practitioners as though she was a military instructor. Her little face was filled with arrogance as the snow white skin of her beautiful arms and legs laid mostly exposed. Her skin was so bright and lustrous that it distracted many vigorous youths; they couldn’t focus no matter what.

In order to let her be at ease and concentrate on her cultivation, Ling Chengye had already personally promised her that she would no longer be bound to her engagement with Qin Lie.

Ling Xuanxuan had already relaxed, and with Qin Lie not showing up for half a month, she had already gradually forgotten that someone like that even existed in the Ling Family.

“Big Brother, in the past five years, Qin Lie had never taken any abnormal actions. This time, he didn’t return for half a month, maybe... he already died in the mines.” Ling Chengzhi’s mind slightly trembled. He lowered his voice and said, “In this half a month, there was no lightning striking down onto Herb Mountain. The badly withered medicinal herbs had clearly recovered a lot.

Even though we still were not able to gather enough spirit herbs to turn into Nebula Pavilion this time, we shouldn't be affected too much in the future."

"Sigh, I promised Qin Shan to take care of him, but even I couldn't enter the mine..." Ling Family's Patriarch shook his head and sighed softly. He looked at Ling Yushi beside him and was actually relieved in his heart as he continued, "If he was really in an accident, then that would mean Yushi has dodged a bullet, and doesn't have to be engaged to him anymore?"

"What if he appeared again?" Ling Yushi locked her eyebrows and inquired in a gentle voice.

She didn't know why, but she still had the feeling that Qin Lie wouldn't have succumbed to an accident that easily. She couldn't fathom the reason why she thought that way, but she felt like Qin Lie wasn't as simple as everyone else thought.

Only now, she still couldn't confirm for sure nor could she be certain whether Qin Lie was really strange or not.

"If he really appears, sigh, then that means you are unlucky. Daddy can only follow the promise I made with Qin Shan back then, and let you two be engaged earlier." Ling Family's Patriarch had a helpless expression on his face. "Sigh, it's not that I hope he would get into an accident, it's just, it's just that his reappearance would really trouble our Ling Family. Engagement is something troublesome, and the spirit herbs on Herb Mountain... are our Ling Family's roots."

“Mn, we still don’t know how to deal with Nebula Pavilion. That bitch of a woman has been pressing us often lately, even I am running out of patience!” Ling Chengzhi’s face was dark. He took a deep breath and asked, “Big Brother, we…?”

“Stop talking! The time isn’t right!” scolded the Ling Family’s Patriarch as he cautiously looked around them. Seeing that the Du Family wasn’t watching, he then said in a low voice, “I will soon personally bring some people up the Arctic Mountain Range. Hopefully, we can find some spirit plants and herbs to cover the loss from Herb Mountain and give Nebula Pavilion an explanation.”

“Going to the Arctic Mountain Range again?” The expression on Ling Yushi’s soft, beautiful face changed slightly as she said with a fearful heart, “Last time there was a lot of damage, and it sacrificed many members of our clan. With our Ling Family’s strength, going deep into the Arctic Mountain Range is too risky, Father, you need to consider this carefully.”

“We don’t have a choice!” Ling Family’s Patriarch shouted.

“The fool is back!”

“The fool is back in town!”

“Oh, he isn’t dead yet?”

At this moment, many people were yelling from the town's entrance. When Ling Chengye and the others, who were on the spectator seats, heard those shouts, their expressions all turned strange as they were depressed in their hearts.

In the two brother's eyes, Qin Lie's return was essentially a leaking roof in the rain; it only brought the Ling Family new troubles.

Ling Yushi's tranquil face also revealed a slightly helpless and bitter expression as she sighed within her heart: So this is fate, huh?

Chapter 14: Living While Being Cared For

With a wooden expression, Qin Lie walked along the stone road towards the town's entrance.

He still seemed as ashen and bereaved as half a month ago, his eyes devoid of any expression and his clothes speckled with traces of mud. He was clearly exhausted and distressed.

Behind him, while wearing colorful clothes which accentuated her well-rounded figure and walking at a steady pace, was Ling Ying. Her bright eyes showed a great amount of doubt.

After Qin Lie left Herb Mountain half a month ago, the Ling Family Patriarch desperately wanted to meet him. Believing that Qin Lie was still in the mountain tunnels, he had arranged for people to wait for Qin Lie at the entrance to Herb Mountain's mine all day and night.

During the night, Ling Feng watched, and during the day, Ling Ying watched. The two took shifts watching, waiting for him to appear so they could immediately report it to the Patriarch.

Because of this, Du Heng, who was extremely curious towards what was inside of Herb Mountain, was constantly unable to find an opportunity to thoroughly explore it.

As for Ling Feng and Ling Ying, when they were ordered by Ling Chengye to wait outside the entrance of Herb Mountain's mine, they were also strictly prohibited from entering inside. Thus, even

now, they didn't know what secrets were being protected.

This evening, Ling Ying had been watching the mine entrance as usual, almost bored to the point of falling asleep, when suddenly, she saw Qin Lie come out from the direction of the Arctic Mountain Range.

At the time, Ling Ying had almost been shocked to the point of shrieking.

She followed Qin Lie along the road, her suspicious eyes glued the swaying body of Qin Lie, but she still wasn't able to figure anything out. This caused her to become even more doubtful within the depths of her heart.

"This fool was actually not in the mine, but the Arctic Mountain Range for half a month. What for? Moreover, he went in by himself, just how did he survive?"

The more Ling Ying thought about it, the more she couldn't understand it. Surprise spread across her charming face. For the first time, she felt some curiosity towards Qin Lie.

Qin Lie was naturally conscious of Ling Ying's eyes gazing at him from behind, but he felt no anxiousness in his heart. Long before he was about to about to reach Herb Mountain, he had already appropriately hidden the two bags. He was afraid that if he carried too much on him, it would only cause him unnecessary trouble. Now that his body was free of the bags, he was no longer afraid of the Ling Family questioning him about the materials he was

carrying.

Towards the people of the Ling Family, it could be said that he didn't have any affection, but at the same time, he didn't have any hatred towards them either. From his point of view, the relationship between the Ling Family and him and his grandpa stopped at just being business partners.

His grandpa had repaired spirit artifacts for the Ling Family, and in return, they were given the rights to use the insides of Herb Mountain, which they used to help him cultivate the "Heavenly Thunder Eradication" —— It was nothing more than that.

Acting like he usually did, he entered the town, ignoring the glares and criticism of those around him as he walked directly to his stone house.

One after another, people remarked, "The fool has returned." However, it was all filtered out by Qin Lie who had long since become accustomed to it, and thus it didn't affect him.

Before long, he had returned to his three room stone house. The stone house had clearly been cleaned, as everything was extremely clean, but Qin Lie paid it no notice. Closing the door, he began to rest.

His return to town caused many people who were attentive towards him, such as Ling Chengye, his brother, and the Du Family, to feel inexplicably confused...

There were also people who were indifferent, such as Ling Xuanxuan. She was still yelling within the martial arts arena and didn't even bat an eye towards Qin Lie...

"Patriarch." Ling Ying stopped following Qin Lie, her clothes fluttering as she quickly arrived beside Ling Chengye. Her enchanting, small face full of uncertainty as she tenderly whispered, "He, he didn't come out from the mine, but... but from the direction of the Arctic Mountain Range! He wasn't in the mines at all for a full half a month's time!"

As soon as she finished speaking, the other three Ling Family members all showed expressions of shock. They were endlessly curious about Qin Lie's whereabouts this past half a month.

"Understood, don't say a word of this to others."

The Ling Family Patriarch pondered for a moment, then ordered Ling Ying to not speak of it and motioned for her to leave. Afterwards, he gave Ling Chengzhi a meaningful glance, and the two brothers, along with Ling Yushi, all rose, walking towards Qin Lie's stone house.

The three very quickly arrived in front of the door to Qin Lie's stone house. Ling Chengye knocked on the door. "Qin Lie, it's Uncle Ling, please open your door for a moment."

Within the house, Qin Lie opened his eyes, slightly frowning. Afterwards, he quickly adjusted his expression, resuming his usual blank expression before opening the door and letting the three

people in.

Over these five years, there had occasionally been times where Ling Chengye had come over, but that had been when Qin Shan was still here, and it had always been to find Qin Shan to repair spirit artifacts.

After his grandfather had left, Ling Chengye hadn't come once these last two years. This visit caused Qin Lie's suspicion to quickly rise. He didn't know what these three's intentions were.

After the three Ling Family members entered, they saw Qin Lie sitting on a stone chair, staring blankly ahead at a cup atop the stone table. It was as if the cup was more interesting than the three of them...

Ling Chengye attentively glared at Qin Lie. After observing for a while, he suddenly said, "Qin Lie, I don't know if you can hear me or not, nor do I know if you are truly always like that, but I just want to say... towards my Ling Family, the spirit plants and spirit herbs atop Herb Mountain are extremely important, and these last two years, the spirit plants have started withering off in large amounts. This has already begun affecting the foundations of the Ling Family."

Crouching down, Ling Chengye deeply gazed into Qin Lie's eyes, but was unable to find any abnormalities. Feeling helpless, he could only continue on, saying, "If, if you can hear this, if you have any methods, I hope the withering of the spirit plants atop Herb Mountain can stop. The Ling Family... we cannot afford such a heavy loss and we plead you to be careful about this matter."

Qin Lie remained silent, continuing to look at the cup.

“There is one more thing.” Ling Chengye hesitated for a moment before he, increasingly helplessly, said, “I promised your grandfather that I would look after you until you were seventeen, and one of the methods is to engage you to one of my daughters. Based on what your grandfather and I agreed on, the engagement ceremony should be held soon. I am only notifying you beforehand, it… is between you and Yushi. I will arrange it as soon as possible, the ceremony will be held during this period of time.”

Qin Lie remained like a block of wood with no change in his expression. Ling Yushi’s face actually flushed, her expression embarrassed.

“However, I am telling you now, this engagement is only to protect you, and will only last two years time. After two years, no matter how, I will dissolve the engagement. I hope you will mentally prepare yourself.” Ling Chengye thought for a moment, then continued to add on, saying, “Your grandfather treated my Ling Family with grace. These few years, we have worked together happily, and we hope it will continue to be that way in the future. Yes, no matter what your true situation is, I will not delve into your affairs. For everyone to get along happily is enough.”

Finishing his speech, Ling Chengye stood up, motioning for his younger brother and his daughter to leave with him.

“Daddy, I would like to speak some words with him by myself.

Please leave first," gently said Ling Yushi, bowing her head.

Feeling guilty towards her, Ling Chengye sighed within the depths of his heart before simply nodding and walking away with his brother out of the stone house.

Within the room, everything settled down. Gradually, the atmosphere within the room became a little awkward as Qin Lie still remained expressionless and unresponsive. It was as if he didn't know there was a beautiful young girl within the room beside him.

Ling Yushi bit her lower lip as her cheeks flushed red, then suddenly rose and said, "You must have not washed in a long time, I'll help you fetch water."

Finished speaking, she elegantly rose, rolling up the sleeves along her slender arms and exposing her snow white wrists. Looking somewhat embarrassed, she went into the washroom to fetch water.

Only once the wooden barrel was filled with water and the towels and other items were put away did she come back out again.

Through these consecutive actions, she managed to adjust herself and slowly calmed down.

A trace of self-pity and helplessness appeared upon her delicate and beautiful face. Resigned, she said, "My Ling Family owes

Grandpa Qin Shan a favor. Through these two years, I will repay what is owed. Once we are truly engaged, I will often come and take care of you. Ah, I can only do some cleaning and stuff like helping you fetch water, I hope you can understand."

While she spoke, Ling Yushi grabbed a rag that had been dipped in water, and, not caring about Qin Lie's reaction, began to skillfully clean the room.

Although Qin Lie's eyes were blank, his mind was cognizant. Through observing Ling Yushi's familiarity with the house, he very quickly realized that the person who had been cleaning his house for the last half a month was none other than this delicate and beautiful lady.

"Ah, you are also very pitiful. After Grandpa Qin Shan died, you were left by yourself, and your mind isn't very good...

"Originally, my father was prepared to let you be engaged with my younger sister who is about the same age as you, but she is the only hope of the Ling Family and father was afraid that engaging her to you would affect her cultivation. Moreover, her future marriage is a big thing. Thus... it could only be that I replaced her.

"Ha, although I am the elder sister, I truly do not have as high of a talent for cultivating. I am already seventeen, and I'm afraid that there is no way for me to break through to the Natal Opening Realm before I am twenty. Nebula Pavilion is extremely picky when selecting core disciples, if you cannot break through to the Natal Opening Realm before twenty, you will never earn their approval during your life.

“My father and third uncle have wanted to enter the Nebula Pavilion for forever, but it just isn’t their fate. Their lifelong dreams which cannot be fulfilled have been placed upon my younger sister.

“Ah, because of the withering of the medicinal herbs, we have once again caught the attention of the Du Family. Because of what they have recently stirred up, we have been annoyed to death. That woman, she’s just bent on taking Herb Mountain for herself. This time, she’s bearing down menacingly, and I don’t know if we can stop her.”

Perhaps it was because she was very soon going to be engaged with Qin Lie, or perhaps it was because she thought Qin Lie wouldn’t understand what she was saying, but she didn’t have too many walls around her heart. Thus, while she worked, she constantly spoke her mind and muttered incessantly to herself. This let Qin Lie gain a deeper understanding of the Ling Family’s situation.

It also caused him to further understand Ling Yushi and his perception of her to undergo a certain degree of change...

After she finished, Ling Yushi didn’t prolong her stay. As soon as she told Qin Lie that the water was ready and for him to remember to bathe early on, she quietly left the stone house.

Qin Lie listened for a while, and only after he was certain she had left did he walk into the washroom.

Seeing the large amount of water soaking into the ground by the water barrel and the pile of not so neatly folded towels, he shook his head, unable to stifle his laughter.

It was obvious to him that Ling Yushi must not have done these tasks very often, and coupled with the effects of her being flustered, it must have become this way.

Rubbing his nose, Qin Lie indifferently took off his clothes and entered the water barrel. Afterwards, his body was suddenly jolted, causing him to almost shriek.

It was actually cold water!

……

The second morning, Qin Lie, eyes blank with a runny nose, entered the Ling Dining Hall.

Ling Yushi, with a guilty conscience, upon seeing Qin Lie walk in with his runny nose, quickly held in her desire to laugh and lowered her head, not daring to look him in the eye.

Because of the matter with the spirit plants, the Ling brothers and Du Jiaolan were beginning to go tit for tat. A dense, depressing tension filled the air, causing Qin Lie to feel as if a war might start between the two atop the table at any time.

After eating, he walked towards Herb Mountain's mines to continue his cultivation. Because he wasn't in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, he had to carefully control the heavenly thunder's power. Otherwise, the spillover of electric current would kill more of the spirit plants and spirit herbs.

Ling Chengye's remark had ended up playing its role. Qin Lie didn't wish to destroy the Ling Family's roots, lest he attract endless trouble.

Now that Qin Lie had fully recovered, Ling Feng and Ling Ying no longer guarded the mine entrance. Thus, one night, Du Heng finally found his opportunity to enter the mine.

After a bit of dizzying exploration, Du Heng's psyche suddenly became startled. Like Ling Chengzhi, he was completely astonished by the mine's changes.

Just as Du Heng was within the mine, preparing his report on its situation to his mother, Ling Chengye was also making arrangements. He ordered Ling Xuanxuan and Ling Chengzhi to go on a temporary leave, making them take a trip to Icestone City.

This was because it was clear to him that once Ling Xuanxuan learned of her sister replacing her as Qin Lie's fiancée, she would definitely explode in anger, cause problems, and try to obstruct Qin Lie's engagement to Ling Yushi.

However, sending away Ling Xuanxuan was only one of the reasons why Ling Chengye wanted them to go to Icestone City.

More importantly, he wanted them to say hello to Nebula Pavilion.

Ling Xuanxuan was an extraordinary talent, and Nebula Pavilion had already noticed her. Ling Chengye hoped that Nebula Pavilion would give her a little face and extend the grace period for the Ling Family to send herbs and plants.

……

The last few days, Ling Yushi did as she promised, often visiting Qin Lie's stone house.

During the day, taking advantage of the time when Qin Lie wasn't there, she would take the clothes he took off and wash them. In the evening, when Qin Lie returned home, she would bring the dry clothes over, fetch water for his bath, and help him clean the house.

The kind of embarrassing errors like fetching cold water for the bath never occurred again. Of course, she never changed her habits, speaking what was on her mind every day to herself.

Qin Lie, after the initial awkwardness, also gradually adapted, slowly becoming accustomed to having someone care for him.

As soon as Ling Yushi fetched the water, he no longer waited till she left, directly heading to the washroom to bathe.

Every time he sat naked in the barrel bathing, he would

eavesdrop on Ling Yushi complaining softly outside of the door that separated them. Sometimes, he would slightly raise his eyebrows, while other times, the corners of his mouth would reveal a strange smile.

"I'm leaving first, wash slowly." Ling Yushi's gentle voice emanated over. Just when Qin Lie thought she was about to leave, Ling Yushi, who was in front of the door, suddenly began to breathe disorderly. In a voice as low as a mosquito's buzz, she whispered, "Tomorrow, tomorrow will be the day that my father arranged..."

Only after she left for a very long time did Qin Lie finally react. He sat in the barrel blankly looking at the house's beams. He remained like that for a long while before he finally regained his senses.

Chapter 15: Engagement Ceremony

Dawn had yet to break, but Qin Lie had already quietly left for Herb Mountain. The two leather bags that he had brought back with him from the Arctic Mountain Range had long since been retrieved and placed within the cave where he cultivated.

One of the bags contained the Umbra Lightning Condor's beast cores and ten stalks of Ice Stalk Grass.

The other bag contained some spirit stones, spirit pills, and other bits and pieces of spirit materials, all of which had originally belonged to the practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor.

As of late, Qin Lie had been supplementing his cultivation with the Umbra Lightning Condor beast cores and Ice Stalk Grass. These two materials were extremely beneficial towards helping him gather spirit energy and let him clearly feel the building up of strength within his spirit sea.

As for the spirit stones, spirit pills, and the other various spirit materials, he didn't place them upon his heart. Firstly, it was due to the fact that he didn't know their true value. Secondly, the Ice Stalk Grass and Umbra Lightning Condor beast cores showed more effectiveness during his current cultivation.

"Engagement ceremony…"

Qin Lie picked out some of the prettier looking spirit pills and spirit stones and used an even smaller cloth bag to collect them.

Then, he put the bag within the upper portion of his clothes.

When he had heard Ling Yushi bring up the engagement, his first thought had been to refuse it as he didn't want his relationship with the Ling Family to become entangled. Moreover, he didn't wish to harm Ling Yushi.

Later on, after pondering over it for a long time, he decided that this matter was something which had been arranged by his grandfather long ago, and thus his opposition towards the matter greatly declined.

Furthermore, the Ling Family Patriarch had clearly stated himself that this engagement wasn't real and was purely just a walk-through of the ceremony. After two years, it would be cut off.

A fake ceremony, from his point of view, was just a mere formality, and thus it was not something he cared about.

Also, during this most recent time period, Qin Lie had slowly grown accustomed to Ling Yushi often coming over and taking care of him.

After all, he was still only a fifteen year old boy. Having been by himself for so long, he greatly enjoyed the care of the beautiful, sister-like girl who helped him fetch water and clean his clothes.

If he was engaged to Ling Yushi, she would care for him for two years. Otherwise, he might no longer be able to continue enjoying

this kind of treatment.

After a while of consideration, Qin Lie no longer opposed the matter and prepared himself to go through the motions.

Although he normally played a fool, Qin Lie, who had already awoken, still felt some guilt towards his engagement, and thus, he had come to Herb Mountain and fetch some things to store on his person in case where they were needed.

Generally, before an engagement ceremony, not only did the fiance's side have to prepare a betrothal gift and bring all of their family's elders, they also had to worship their ancestors.

As Qin Lie didn't have any relatives nor did he know about his ancestors, these steps were omitted.

After collecting some stones, he hurriedly returned to his stone house before the sky brightened. After putting in a slight bit of effort into grooming his hair, he sat quietly within the stone house, waiting for the Ling Family members to come and receive him.

……

Ling Family Great Hall.

"Ah, First Miss is truly so pitiful. She's actually going to be engaged to that fool. Before, didn't they say it was going to be

Second Miss?”

“Second Miss’ talent is too good. She is destined to enter Nebula Pavilion in the future, and cannot be tainted. It’s of no use. In the past, Grandpa Qin Shan helped our Ling Family, and the Patriarch had already agreed to his request. How could we break our word?”

“Why can’t we? After all, Qin Shan has died, and just what does that fool know?”

“First miss is so pretty, but she’s going to be cheapened for a fool. Ah, the heavens are so unfair!”

“Indeed.”

Many of the Ling Family members were scattered across the great hall, quietly whispering to each other. They all felt that Qin Lie wasn’t worthy of Ling Yushi and lamented her sacrifice.

After Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan had begun their journey to Icestone City, the Ling Family Patriarch suddenly announced Qin Lie and Ling Yushi’s engagement. Afterwards, without even waiting for people to react, he hastily prepared for the ceremony to be settled by the end of today.

Ling Chengye didn’t notify nor invite any of the surrounding forces that he was on good terms with and only announced it once within the town. It was clear that this event wasn’t going to be a grandiose one.

At this moment, many of the Ling Family members who had been invited had all gathered within the great hall. One of the Ling Family's Elder, Ling Kangan was also among them.

He was the only clan elder to have been invited to come over.

The Ling Family had three clan elders; they were Ling Kangan, Ling Xiang, and Ling Bo. They were all Ling Family practitioners of the previous generation, the same one as Ling Chengye's father.

As the Ling Family was situated very close to the Arctic Mountain Range, a practitioner's development was faced with many challenges. Sometimes, they would need to enter the depths of the mountain range to hunt spirit beasts and look for spirit plants. Other times they would be confronted with a dispatch from Nebula Pavilion or be at war with another force. Thus, dying a natural death wasn't easy.

The previous generation's Patriarch, Ling Chengye's father, was killed during a battle against hostile forces.

Ling Kangan, Ling Xiang, and Ling Bo; these three clan elders had all either suffered severe wounds across their body, lost their cultivation, or were slowly backtracking along the realms. In general, they would be at home resting. Seldom would they be involved within the matters of the family.

Logically, Ling Yushi's engagement would be a great matter. Not only should Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan have been there,

but the three clan elders should have come out as well.

But, from the beginning, Ling Chengye didn't put this matter to heart and was already preparing for the future divorce. Thus, he didn't bother calling for the other two clan elders to come over and only called for Ling Kangan to come and simply show himself.

"Those surnamed Du haven't come, I guess Patriarch didn't invite them. Mn, this way it will be much more concise."

"Hmph! They aren't even people of our Ling Town, why would we bother inviting them?"

"Whenever I see that mother and her two children, a fire ignites within me!"

Many of the Ling Family's youth were situated at the corners. Bringing up Du Jiaolan and her children, their faces all immediately became indignant with a dense, cold glint in their eyes.

……

One of the older women of the Ling Family brought Qin Lie towards the great hall. Along the way, she had no clue what to say, nor did she know if Qin Lie would understand what she said. She could only say, "In a while, all you need to do is stay with me. Let me arrange everything for you. The Patriarch, with his detailed mind, has already prepared everything for you. Yes, he has even

prepared your bridal gift.”

The old lady waved around the wooden box she was holding in front of Qin Lie.

Qin Lie was startled in his mind, but after pondering for a moment, he foolishly laughed and then took out the cloth bag, putting it on top of the wooden box in the old lady’s hand. He indicated that it was his own bridal gift.

The old lady was clearly surprised for a moment. After looking strangely at Qin Lie for a while, she expertly felt around the cloth bag, secretly weighing it. Upon realizing that the contents of the cloth bag should be things like stones, her face became filled with self-depreciation.

She shook her head, not bothering to open the bag to check its contents. She thought to herself: And I had thought that he had become smart. It seems like fools are just fools, even stones that they pick up can become treasures...

Very quickly, amidst the sound of fireworks, the old lady brought Qin Lie to the front entrance of the great hall.

She offered up the wooden box in her hand, as well as Qin Lie’s cloth bag. Afterwards, she nodded her head towards the wooden box, indicating to the person receiving the bridal gift that it was the one that had been prepared earlier. Afterwards, she nodded towards the cloth bag with a smile and shook her head, pulling Qin Lie inside.

With Qin Lie's arrival, the bustling within the great hall suddenly calmed down.

When the masses saw Qin Lie's wooden expression, all of their eyebrows unconsciously began to wrinkle up, tempted to shake their heads and sigh. Within their hearts, they all believed that he was not worthy of Ling Yushi.

With a glance, Qin Lie saw Ling Yushi.

She had clearly undergone a meticulous makeover.

She wore a bright red dress which stuck closely to her body, accentuating the appearance of her slender, graceful body, and her cheeks had been lightly colored bright red, causing her to look extraordinarily beautiful. Her fine crystal jewelry caused her to seem even more lovely.

Her skin was as white as jade, her appearance was extremely graceful. Her clear, bright eyes coupled with her aura of elegance made her seem as if she were a fairy from the lunar palace. She was so beautiful it caused everyone's psyche to sway and to be unable to restrain themselves.

However, the more movingly beautiful she looked, the more the masses felt pity for her.

As the masses observed the dignified, elegant Ling Yushi and

then turned their eyes to wooden Qin Lie, they all felt increasingly uncomfortable. They all began to sigh, one by one, trying to lessen their discomfort.

Of course, not all of the people acted so kindly. Some of the Ling Family girls, such as the ones who didn't have good relationships with Ling Yushi or those who were jealous of her beauty, quietly whispered words which were unpleasant to the ear, their eyes revealing their how they desired to ridicule and laugh at Ling Yushi.

Observing his quiet, beautiful daughter beside him while listening to the public outcries within the great hall, Ling Chengye felt endless guilt within his heart.

Wishing for the ceremony to end faster, Ling Chengye hurriedly glared at the old lady, signaling for her to quickly finish the ceremonial walk so that they could wrap up the farce that he had drawn up.

The old lady took the hint, yelling loudly as she began to lead the tedious ceremony between Qin Lie and Ling Yushi.

Listening to the incessant mutterings of the masses and enduring the endless streams of stares, which contained pity, sympathy, and sarcasm, Ling Yushi could only pretend to be indifferent and occasionally smile towards the crowd.

... Only she knew the bitterness and sourness hidden within the depths of her heart.

“This is life, I cannot blame others. Father and the rest of them have all sacrificed so much for the family, this is the way it should be… The time has come for me to make my sacrifice for the family. Qin Lie, although he is… like that, a fool also has his good sides. He won’t harm me, nor will he care about what I do. And when he closed his eyes, he was honestly good looking. If, if he wasn’t a fool, if he was normal as could be, even if he were an ordinary person, it would still be easier to accept though…”

Ling Yushi secretly comforted herself, but upon thinking of what was to come, she couldn’t help but resent and pity herself.

Every girl fantasized about their other half being someone who was handsome, who was able to protect and care for them. Ling Yushi, at only seventeen, was naturally no exception, and thus she had also had this fantasy.

But reality was just so cruel…

At this time, a hand suddenly grabbed her tight, causing Ling Yushi to suddenly tense up.

Then she heard the old lady’s shouts, and she immediately understood that the ceremony had proceeded to this point, the point where she and Qin Lie were supposed to hold hands and walk down together. She also understood that Qin Lie’s hand had probably only grabbed hers with the help of the old lady.

She, who had never had any physical contact with a male before,

felt nervous in the depths of her heart, but she quickly realized Qin Lie's hand was extremely slender and soft. It seemed as if it was even more comfortable than grasping her sister's hand by a significant margin. This caused her to become shocked and to unconsciously look at Qin Lie beside her.

Suddenly, after becoming so close together, she vaguely discerned from within the darkness of depths of Qin Lie's wooden eyes what seemed to be a hidden, scattered radiance.

That radiance even inexplicably calmed her, allowing her disordered heart to gradually quiet down.

"That's strange..."

She secretly whispered to herself, unconsciously holding onto Qin Lie's hand, and gripped it even tighter. It actually caused her to feel even more comfortable.

"Big brother, what is the meaning of this?" At this time, Du Jiaolan's unique, harsh tone suddenly emanated in from outside.

Afterwards, the Du Jiaolan and her two sons walked in, along with the practitioners that Du Haitian and arranged for them and the other two Ling Family clan elders. The large group of them all entered the great hall.

Once all of the gazes were directed at her, Du Jiaolan coldly said with a sinister face, "My niece's engagement is such a great matter,

yet elder brother didn't even inform me of it? Are you looking down on me, or do you not consider me one of the Ling Family's members?

Without waiting for Ling Chengye's explanation, she suddenly pointed towards the two Ling Family elders that were sitting in wheelchairs behind her, acrimoniously saying, "And then there are your two clan elders. In the past, they risked their lives for the Ling Family and became disabled as a result, yet you didn't bother inviting them either. Ling Chengye! Just what is the meaning behind this?!"

"Chengye, what exactly is going on ?" asked the eldest clan elder, Ling Xiang, with a straight face. Pushed forward by one of the Du Family practitioners, he continued, "We two old fellows have worked hard for the Ling Family for our entire lives, but in the end, we don't even have the status to participate in the engagement ceremony of the younger generation?"

"Your actions are completely looking down on us!" exclaimed the other clan elder, Ling Bo, forcefully slapping down on his wheelchair, his face filled with anger. He continued to scold, "Don't forget, we three clan elders have the right to replace the Patriarch!"

As soon as his remark came out, not only did Ling Chengye's expression change, so did the expressions of all of Ling Family members within the great hall. They all looked terrified.

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Chapter 16: Forced Abdication!

Trouble's brewing!

The entire Ling Family became alarmed when they saw Ling Bo and Ling Xiang, the two rarely seen elders, by Du Jiaolan's side. They realized that something big was about to happen.

The reason that Du Jiaolan had bided her time even after fully investigating the intricacies of the tunnels at Herb Mountain was solely for today!

She wanted to wait for an occasion where all of the Ling Family members had gathered together so that she could execute her plan of deposition in the presence of everyone!

Ling Chengye felt a sudden chill down his spine.

Ling Xiang and Ling Bo were both martial practitioners from the Ling Family's previous generation that had made great contributions to the clan when they were younger. Due to some crippling injuries, they had chosen to live in seclusion and never bothered inquiring about the happenings of the clan.

As such, he gradually began to disregard the two elders. He didn't expect that the two of them would actually side with Du Jiaolan without any prior notice.

"No wonder both the elders' grandsons had a few extra spirit

artifacts and a sudden surge in their cultivation. Seems like these two elders struck a deal behind the scenes for the sake of their grandsons' futures."

The comment from Ling Feng, who was honest and upright, completely dispelled any lingering doubts from the crowd.

This very moment, Du Jiaolan and her sons focused their hostile gazes, coldly fixating upon Ling Feng.

Ling Feng scoffed.

"Does it even concern you? Do not interrupt them!" Ling Ying pleaded under her breath as she tugged at his shirt in an attempt to stop him from being a busybody, lest they nurse a grievance against him.

"Dismissing the clan elders is not something you can do so easily." Ling Kangan was an elder who had always supported Ling Chengye because he knew that the patriarch was the one who toiled the hardest for the family and had never harbored any sort of selfish motives. Hence, he loudly proclaimed, "Only when the patriarch has brought upon great danger to our clan through his errors or has abused his power for personal gain, shaming the family and impeding the clan's success, can the elders even discuss about deposing him."

Looking towards the other two elders, his expression grew cold and he said with a hmph, "The physical health of you two brothers has always been lacking, but it had never been a pressing concern.

However, have your brains started to fail you as well? Have you really been unable to see the efforts that Chengye has put in for the family all these years?”

Ling Xiang and Ling Bo both felt guilty and did not dare to meet his eyes, instead subconsciously lowering their heads.

“In this case, I shall make it clear then!” Du Jiaolan laughed coldly, attracting everyone’s attention back to her.

From amidst the crowd, she walked up to Ling Chengye and faced him, radiating an aura not the least bit weaker than his and harshly stated, ”The various spirit plants and herbs on our Herb Mountain have always been our Ling Family’s number one priority. We are required to pay a yearly tribute of spirit plants to Nebula Pavilion in exchange for their protection. As per your arrangement, this has always been brother-in-law’s responsibility. However, the spirit plants are all withered now. The people from Nebula Pavilion kept urging us to pay our tributes, yet our Ling Family has continuously delayed. Nebula Pavilion is gradually losing patience…”

With regards to the matter of Herb Mountain, the majority of the Ling Family was actually in the dark. After hearing Du Jiaolan’s beratement, the expressions of the crowd changed slightly.

The Ling Family was a vassal of Nebula Pavilion. If they were to continue deferring their payment of spirit herbs for an extended period of time, not only would they no longer receive the protection of Nebula Pavilion, they might even be prosecuted for their offense, putting the entire Ling Family into a serious

predicament.

Du Jiaolan's words silenced everyone as they started to contemplate the possible repercussions.

"And that, is but only the first issue!"

After planting doubt about Ling Chengye's capabilities in everyone's hearts, Du Jiaolan spoke again, "Big Brother, please make it clear, what exactly is up with the tunnels in Herb Mountain? Heng'er went to take a look a few nights ago, can anyone here guess what he saw?"

Ling Chengye's face fell in horror as she pressed on coldly, "There are now several hundred tunnels within Herb Mountain! The number of mining caves have greatly increased, which means that the mining had never even so much as even paused before! Hmph! Big Brother, you must have really invested a great amount of effort into the mining. But why is it that I have yet to see a single piece of ore in our Ling Family's warehouse?"

As the saying goes, 'a tossed stone raises a thousand ripples.' Her words further shook the Ling Family members.

"If there isn't anything valuable within Herb Mountain, why would there be such extensively tunnels? If precious ores were discovered, where did they go? Did big brother take it all for himself?" Du Jiaolan questioned as she continued donning her sarcastic smile. "It seems like when big brother gave the inner portion of Herb Mountain to Qin Family's grandfather grandson

pair, it had actually been a well thought out plan! Furthermore, other Ling Family members were forbidden from entering on your orders. I'm sure that everyone can think for themselves and can figure out what it is that you want to conceal!"

"Chengye, shouldn't you give us an explanation regarding the inner portion of Herb Mountain?" Clan Elder Ling Xiang raised his head at this moment and chimed in to help Du Jiaolan in the interrogation as he too suspected that all the spirit stones from within the mountain had been misappropriated by Ling Chengye.

Even though the remaining members of the Ling Family had all looked up to Ling Chengye, now, they couldn't help but start to suspect him as all their gazes converged onto him.

"I only discovered the situation within Herb Mountain recently, and many tunnels had indeed been dug. I am still investigating this matter and have yet to come up with a conclusion." This sentence was as good as confessing to all of Du Jiaolan's accusations. Amidst the roaring commotion that followed, he continued, "Five years ago, after I allowed Qin Family's grandfather grandson pair to use the inner portion of the mine within the mountain, I have not set foot in there. I am just as unaware and perplexed about what happened as you are."

After his statement, he turned to look deeply at Qin Lie. The audience too turned, yet no one could guess what really happened even after staring at him.

"Who are you trying to fool?" Du Jiaolan's face turned even colder. "If you had no part in it, how is it possible for just the two

of them to dig so many tunnels? Our Ling Family spent numerous decades just to dig a few dozen of those tunnels, yet you are saying that they outdid us so many times over in just five years? Moreover, Qin Shan passed away two years ago. Who would believe you?"

Ling Chengye looked at the surrounding clan members and discovered that many of them were shaking their heads in obvious disbelief.

"If Qin Shan's cultivation level had reached the Fragmentation Realm, he would indeed have the ability to do such a thing. Destroying Herb Mountain itself would be no mean feat to such a practitioner," Ling Chengye helplessly replied.

"Haha, what a total joke! Even if a martial practitioner at the Fragmentation Realm existed, why would he even hole himself among our Ling Family?" Du Jiaolan sarcastically spat out.

The surrounding people continued shaking their heads in further disbelief.

"Also, I don't understand the rationale behind the betrothment of Little Shi and Qin Lie. Have you grown muddled with age? Our clan's Little Shi is so pure and pretty like a flower. Of all the people to betroth her to, you chose this fool?" Smelling victory, Du Jiaolan pressed forward for the coup de grâce. "Could it be that you and Qin Shan struck some shady deal that requires offering Yushi? What could this fool possibly give Little Shi? I am truly curious what sort of bridal gift he has prepared. Uncle Fu, open up the bridal gift for all of us to see!"

Du Jiaolan looked towards Ling Fu, who was in charge of receiving the bridal gifts, with her eyes full of mockery as she anticipated Ling Chengye's complete and utter humiliation.

Her intentions were vicious; she definitely did not plan all this in just the span of a few days. She first started with the matter of the spirit plants not being handled properly, which could bring trouble to the Ling Family. Then, she brought up the matter of the mining caves within Herb Mountain, heavily implying that Ling Chengye was abusing his power to take the valuable ores from the mountain for himself.

And now, she credited the matter of Qin Lie and Ling Yushi's betrothment to Ling Chengye's indifference to his daughter's future, sacrificing her happiness to achieve some unknown motive.

She did all of this to utterly destroy Ling Chengye's reputation within the Ling Family. Be it from a logical or an emotional standpoint, she wanted every single Ling Family member to be displeased with this Patriarch and doubt him.

"I am immensely curious about the price which you sold little Yushi for. Uncle Fu, why haven't you opened the bridal gift for everyone to see?" scoffed Du Jiaolan.

Ling Fu held the bridal gift, his face full of awkwardness, as he was unsure what he should do.

"Ling Fu!" Clan Elder Ling Bo harshly called out. He hardened his

face and instructed, ”Open it up for everyone to see! Let everyone decide for themselves whether or not there are ulterior motives behind this arrangement!”

Everyone’s sights were gathered upon that bridal gift. Defeated by the interrogating gazes of the Ling Family members, Ling Fu helplessly opened the wooden box to reveal several expensive pieces of jewelry made of gold and silver.

“Pfft, just some jewelry? That would perhaps be valuable in the eyes of a commoner, but they are worthless to martial practitioners like us!” Du Jiaolan ignored the dark expression on Ling Chengye’s face as she glanced at the wooden box and continued, ”I trust everyone can tell that these items are definitely not gifted by Qin Lie. It should be clear to everyone whether there are any ulterior motives behind this betrothment...”

“Isn’t there still a cloth bag?” Ling Kangan looked hopefully towards the cloth bag that was originally on top of the wooden box and instructed, ”Open that too.”

“Ah, open it all then, and let us see what kind of treasures there are. If that fool can really take out something valuable to use as bridal gift, I will have nothing left to say!”

Du Jiaolan raised her head, feeling extremely smug when she saw Ling Chengye’s hardened expression. She felt totally delighted, as though she had already utterly defeated Ling Chengye and was on the verge of becoming the next figure of authority for the Ling Family. That would result in the entire Ling Family following both her will and the will of everyone surnamed Du.

Ling Chengye realized he was completely unable to defend himself against Du Jiaolan's brutal attacks. Even the clansmen that used to trust him were now revealing looks of rebuke. His sudden plunge into the abyss of despair left him unable to come up with a suitable way to rebut her despite working his brain furiously.

Ling Yushi bit her lower lips tightly as she saw her father's face contort in despair. Being suspected by the surrounding clan members while Du Jiaolan and company mocked him in delight... Her heart gradually fell as well.

Still holding Qin Lie's hand, she uncontrollably started to tighten her grip and remained oblivious even after her fingernails had already pierced into Qin Lie's palm.

At this moment, the helpless Ling Fu loosened the rope tying the cloth bag under the scrutiny of everyone and withdrew a stone. Lowering his head, he gloomily announced, "It's just some jade stones..."

A piece of clear and transparent prismatic stone was revealed. The stone radiated a faint glow of green as a refreshing wave of spirit energy rippled forth, evidently from within the stone.

Suddenly a person roared, "Spirit stone! At least a Common Grade Six spirit stone!"

"What?! How can it be possible? Have my eyes gone bad? How can it be a Common Grade Six spirit stone? Heavens!" screamed

someone else.

The expressions of Du Jiaolan and company dimmed slightly. “It is actually a Common Grade Six spirit stone; Patriarch indeed knows how to spend. Surely there’s no need to bring out your entire savings just for this one ritual?” she commented coldly.

Ling Chengye too was astonished as he all the more knew that his clan was poor. Whatever spirit stones the Ling Family had were usually obtained by trading extra spirit plants and herbs they harvested, and they were usually below the Common Grade Three.

All this while, those spirit stones had been given to Ling Xuanxuan to use for cultivating. As the amount was truly too little, it was just barely able to keep up with Xuanxuan’s usage rate. Hence, even he was unwilling to use it for cultivation despite being the head of his family.

If he indeed possessed spirit stones at Common Grade Six, he would have handed it to Nebula Pavilion long ago to solve the issue of tributes. Why would he wait till now?

At this moment, Ling Yushi’s dark pupils slightly shimmered, and her face glowed faintly as she glued her eyes to Ling Fu’s hand.

Onto the Common Grade Six spirit stone!

“Is that it?”

“Aren’t there more? Continue taking it out!”

“Uncle Fu, please continue?”

Many of the Ling Family’s young generation involuntarily loudly urged him on, extremely curious about the remaining contents in the cloth bag.

And so, Ling Fu continued retrieving items from the bag…

“Another Common Grade Six spirit stone! Holy, one more! That’s already three!”

“What! A Vigor Recovering Pill! More than ten of those Vigor Recovering Pills!”

“A Hundred Vein Pill! Did I see it wrongly? That is actually a Common Grade Five Hundred Vein Pill! It’s a medicine that martial practitioners at both the Refinement and Natal Opening Realm can use to temper their muscles. Only Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor would have this pill! One such pill is comparable to eight of those Common Grade Six spirit stones!”

“Good heavens! How could there be a Hundred Vein Pill?”

“What, what’s that? A Sea Opening Pill! A Common Grade Six Sea Opening Pill! The Sea Opening Pill used to open the spirit sea! If one had a Sea Opening Pill on hand while making a breakthrough from the Refinement Realm to the Natal Opening

Realm, the chances of successfully breaking through would be greatly increased!”

“If those were given to my daughter as bridal gifts, even if he was dead, not to mention just merely a fool, I would have forced my daughter to marry him!”

Chapter 17: Settlement

In the Ling Family's great hall.

A thick smell of medicine unique only to spirit pills wafted through the air as Ling Fu reached into the cloth bag and placed spirit pills, spirit stones, and many other items from within it on the top of the wooden box.

At this moment, the blood of all the Ling Family members began boiling in excitement. Many had flushed a crimson red as all gazes revealed immense shock. It wasn't only shock in their expressions; desire and greed mixed in as well. They yearned for the cultivation materials on top of the wooden box.

"Th, these items definitely do not come from our Ling Family!" exclaimed Elder Ling Kangan with a trembling voice.

Without a shadow of a doubt in their hearts, those present were completely confident that the Ling Family was incapable of producing the cultivation materials that came out of the cloth bag.

Numerous chunks of Common Grade Six spirit stones, more than ten of those Vigor Recovering Pills, one Common Grade Five Hundred Vein Pill, and one common sixth ranked Sea Opening Pill... The items withdrawn from that unassuming cloth bag caused the Ling Family members utterly lose their composure.

The martial practitioners that Qin Lie killed were all close adjutants to Young Manor Lord Yan Ziqian; some of them were

even born with a silver spoon in their mouths as their fathers held important positions within the manor. This was especially true for the last two martial practitioners at the seventh and eighth level of the Refinement Realm; their relatives surely belonged to the upper echelon of Shattered Ice Manor.

The cultivation materials that these people kept closely guarded on their bodies were rare treasures from Shattered Ice Manor. The Hundred Vein Pill and Sea Opening Pill that belonged to the last two practitioners were painstakingly obtained by their elders in hopes they could breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm.

Naturally a large commotion would erupt if spirit pills, that were considered rare for even the Shattered Ice Manor, were to appear in the midst of the Ling Family which was but a minor force.

“The combination of those spirit stones and pills are probably enough to produce a Natal Opening Realm martial practitioner!” Under the searing gazes of the crowd, Ling Kangan took a deep breath and spoke agitatedly, ”Chengye! Little Yushi doesn’t have much natural talent, hence I had believed it would be highly difficult for her to breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm before she turned twenty. However, now that there are these spirit stones and pills, it is definitely not the same anymore! Barring any accidents, she should be able to breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm before she turns twenty if she uses these cultivation materials!”

Most of the Ling Family members were gossiping between themselves, and their eyes fluctuated between envy, jealousy, and praise whenever they looked at Yushi.

Ling Chengye's face was flushed red with excitement. He felt as though he had suddenly found paradise after having suffered in the deepest depths of hell. He kept nodding his head and was unable to find his tongue for a period of time.

Du Jiaolan and her Du family members were all wide-eyed as their gazes were still fixated on the spirit stones and pills, unable to accept the reality before their very eyes.

"Our Ling Family definitely cannot afford a bridal gift capable of producing a Natal Opening Realm martial practitioner; does anyone has anything else to add? Does anyone still believe that Chengye's actions were inappropriate?" loudly questioned Ling Kangan. He scanned the crowd with bright, shining eyes and saw the Ling Family members lightly nodding their heads as though they no longer opposed the engagement.

"A fool is fine. Mn, an engagement ceremony in exchange for a massive amount of cultivation materials is definitely worth it."

"I would agree if it were me. Isn't it just an engagement ceremony with a fool? Little sister Yushi, if you are unwilling, I will gladly take your place! As long as I receive those gifts that can aid my breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm before I'm twenty, it's fine even if I immediately marry him, not to mention a mere engagement!" voiced someone loudly.

"Qin Lie is only fifteen, and you're almost nineteen. Do you not care what others think of you anymore? Big sister Yushi, I'm only

sixteen. If you feel resentful about it, why not let me take your place?" delicately chirped someone younger.

Hearing the cheers of those young girls, Ling Yushi's beautiful eyes sparkled attractively. She turned her head over, seriously looking at Qin Lie who was by her side. Her previously gloomy expression had melted away and was replaced by a bright glow radiating from her face.

She understood that the spirit pills and stones with unclear origins from the cloth bag had not only harshly slapped the Du Family in their faces, it had also resolved two big problems for her father.

The generous bridal gifts were enough to dispel all doubts that the clan members had about her father, dissolving their distrust towards him. That was the first issue.

Secondly, those spirit stones could be used as a substitute for the spirit plants and herbs required to be tributed to Nebula Pavilion. Without the continued pressure from Nebula Pavilion, Du Jiaolan had no basis to question her father's ability as Patriarch.

"Drip!"

The sound of a drop of fresh blood hitting the ground attracted Ling Yushi's attention. Looking down, she noticed that the drop of fresh blood came from Qin Lie's hand that she had tightly gripped.

She too possessed a cultivation of the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Additionally, she had been recently training in a spirit art that focused on sharp fingernails. Moreover, the palm was one of the most vulnerable piece of flesh on the human body...

Ling Yushi froze for an instant, quickly realizing that it was due to her overwhelming despair from before that she gripped Qin Lie's hands with too much force, to the point where even she was unaware that her fingernails had pierced his palm.

"Drip!"

Another drop of fresh blood fell. She raised her head to look at Qin Lie and found that his expression was still blank. Not once during the whole episode did he reveal any hint of pain, nor had he spoken a single word about it. He did not so much as even jerk his hand!

At this moment, she felt that Qin Lie's eyes, those same eyes that seemed to be perpetually dull, were now actually filled with a boundless might!

She felt a deep cut in her maiden heart at this and a figure stealthily burrowed into her heart, branding her...

"I believe... that these bridal gifts were already prepared when Senior Qin Shan and I agreed on the engagement that year. Senior Qin Shan had told me before that the reason he readily lowered himself to stay at our Ling Family's Herb Mountain was to treat Qin Lie." Ling Chengye quickly regained his calm after his loss of

control. He was the patriarch after all.

Pointing at his own head, Ling Chengye implied that Qin Shan was treating Qin Lie's mind during their time in Herb Mountain's caves.

"Before Senior Qin Shan passed away, he had informed me that Qin Lie's mental problems would gradually improve and a complete recovery was definitely possible!" Ling Chengye's creativity kicked into overdrive as his lies gradually grew more fluent, "I didn't expect Senior Qin Shan to be so robust. It was only a while ago that I had entered the inner portion of Herb Mountain and was shocked by senior's masterpiece! I believe that senior's cultivation level was definitely unfathomable. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any other explanation for the numerous tunnels and strange formations!

"I won't hide it from anyone now, that was the first time I ventured into the inner portion of the mining caves, and I was shocked at the number of tunnels. I tried to delve deeper into the belly of the mountain, but I was befuddled by the strange formations. In the end, I could only return home in defeat."

Ling Chengye looked at the crowd as he weaved some truths into his lies, "As for whether spirit stones exist within the mountain, I personally believe that the answer to that is no. Should anyone think otherwise, they are free to take a look for themselves. The formations there do not injure, they only restrict people from proceeding further in. If something valuable is actually found within the mountain, then that would be a blessing for our entire Ling Family."

After the family members' suspicions were directed to Herb Mountain by shifting all responsibility onto the missing Qin Shan, resulting in everyone's suspicions shifting to the Herb Mountain, he spoke in a serious tone, "I have already arranged for Third Brother and Xuanxuan to inform Nebula Pavilion about this matter. That is the reason why they are not in attendance for this ceremony. Mn, there is no need for everyone to worry. I will properly handle everything and not bring any trouble to the Ling Family."

Following his explanation, the Ling Family members' doubts started to be dispelled. They turned their heads in unison to berate Du Jiaolan and mock the two elders Ling Xiang and Ling Bo, who had ignored Chengye's merits for material benefits. Some members of the family even went as far as saying that they were totally ridiculous and muddled with age.

The faces of Du Jiaolan and her sons paled as they heard the harsh comments from the crowd. She then knew that her meticulous plan to depose Chengye had failed miserably.

"Since Big Brother does not welcome us, we shall not stay any further to invite scorn!" Du Jiaolan steeled her face and took one cold glance at Qin Lie as she angrily led her Du Family members away.

"The plan to usurp the patriarch was actually spoiled by a fool, that damned person!" She was seething as she cursed in her heart after taking a final square look at Qin Lie.

Ling Xiang and Ling Bo were aware of their guilt and could not bear to stay any longer. They were pushed away in their wheelchairs by the Du Family.

“The ceremony continues!”

Ling Chengye looked deeply towards Qin Lie with eyes full of thought as he suddenly shouted.

Under the arrangement of an old woman and the complicated gazes of the crowd, the halted ceremony eventually continued. As the firecrackers rang out again, Qin Lie and Ling Yushi’s engagement ceremony was finally concluded.

The crowd gradually thinned out.

When only the Ling Family’s father and daughter pair, with a few other core members, were left, Qin Lie loosened his hand from Ling Yushi’s grasp and made his way outside as per his usual routine without treating the wounds on his palm, all while ignoring the shouts of the Ling Family and the delicate calls of Yushi.

“Qin Lie! Regardless of what happened to you, or whether you can hear me, I must really thank you this time!” Ling Family’s Patriarch raised his voice as he stepped out of the halls, chasing after Qin Lie’s back figure as he solemnly expressed his gratitude.

Qin Lie’s figure made towards Herb Mountain as usual without a

single pause, rapidly disappearing from everyone's sight.

"Chengye, do you believe that this Qin Lie has been pretending to be a fool?" Elder Ling Kangan's heart shook as he blurted in surprise while shaking his head, "For over five whole years? Why? I don't quite believe it."

"Daddy, you're saying, saying that Qin Lie..." Ling Yushi was thoroughly agitated upon hearing that exchange. Continuing in her small voice, "He... He isn't really a fool?"

"I do not know either." Ling Chengye laughed bitterly. "He is becoming more and more unfathomable. Also, I just don't understand, where did he get those spirit pills and stones? It's weird, this is seriously weird..."

"Didn't Qin Shan leave those for him?" Ling Kangan was shocked.

Ling Chengye shook his head and said, "The previous speech was specifically for quelling our clan members. I practically had no interaction with Qin Shan at all, and I know nothing about him. However, it should be true that Qin Shan's is not a normal person. As for how high his cultivation level is, I am simply unable to even make an estimate..."

"If it weren't for the spirit pills and stones, we would really be unable to handle Du Jiaolan's coup. I really did not expect Ling Xiang and Ling Bo to be bought over by her. It was truly a close call this time." Ling Kangan was unceasingly worried even after the

incident had finished. “Regardless, Qin Lie has helped us tremendously this time. He solved two of our biggest issues at once. Looks like Ling Yushi has to put up with him for two years or we would never be able to pay back this debt.”

“It’s nothing much…”

As she stared at the bloodstains on her right hand, recalling Qin Lie’s complete lack of resistance as she dug her nails into his palm, waves of ripples spread through Ling Yushi’s heart. She felt a dull ache in her heart for him as she no longer held any resentment.

“Shi’er, regardless of whether or not he really is a fool or just pretending to be one, please take good care of him for these two years as our Ling Family owes him at least that,” Ling Chengye sighed.

“Mn.” Ling Yushi nodded her head obediently as her beautiful eyes revealed a hint of joy, as though she was pleased to accept such an arrangement.

Chapter 18: “Ling Lie’s” Face

“Crashhh!”

The tea kettle’s lid dropped from Du Jiaolan’s hand and shattered into little pieces. Her expression became as dark and profound as water as a sinister cold light emanated from her eyes.

“My elaborately drawn out plan has actually been destroyed by a fool. I will make him disappear.”

Du Qishan, Du Heng, Du Fei, and several other Du Family members had similarly cold and dark expressions as they dispersed within the hall.

“Madam, how could that fool possess so many spirit stones and pills?” asked Du Qishan with a puzzled expression.

He was the same as Du Jiaolan, with a cultivation at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm. He had been arranged to come by Du Haitian, his main task being to assist Du Jiaolan as she attempted to take control of the Ling Family. “The strange formations within Herb Mountain are extremely mysterious. Not even I can see through its profound secrets. If they were truly put up by Qin Shan, then Qin Shan… was really not so simple.”

“Is that still a question? Those spirit stones and pills were most definitely left behind by Qin Shan. After all, he was still an Artificer. It isn’t strange for one to have those materials.” Du Jiaolan coldly snorted and continued, “No matter whether Qin

Shan was simple or not, he died two years ago. It is impossible for a dead man to bring us trouble."

"I await Madam's next order," said Du Qishan respectfully.

"Contact Haitian as quickly as possible and tell him about the situation within Herb Mountain. Have him pull some strings within Nebula Pavilion and prevent Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan from meeting the elders there. As long as they aren't able to meet the elders, we will still be able to control whether or not the matter regarding the tribute of medicinal plants comes up for the Ling Family. It will continue being something that we can use to blackmail Ling Chengye. We can just say that Nebula Pavilion requires some Jade Hand Flowers from Herb Mountain and accuse him of some unfavorable charges."

Du Jiaolan only gave him this one command. She then looked towards Du Heng and instructed, "Continue closely observing Herb Mountain and the surrounding area as you have recently been doing. Once Ling Chengye opens up Herb Mountain to the public, there will definitely be a lot of Ling Family members who will go in and explore it. Perhaps they will discover something. There are definitely eccentric things within the mountain. Otherwise the spirit plants wouldn't just wither away, and Qin Shan and grandson wouldn't hold onto it for dear life."

"No need to worry mother, I will carefully observe that side," said Du Heng, nodding in assent.

Looking towards Du Fei, the youngest, Du Jiaolan frowned and instructed, "Pay attention to the fool. If he is ever by himself,

notify me.”

Du Fei also nodded in response.

……

Icestone City.

Nebula Pavilion was situated within the southern part of the city where towering buildings stood one after another. Amongst these buildings were many stone towers. Stationed atop every stone tower were cultivators wearing Nebula Pavilion’s uniform, each one looking down at the surrounding areas from far above.

“Please convey to Elder Han that Ling Chengzhi of the Ling Family requests an audience,” said Ling Chengzhi with a smile to the gate guards at the southern entrance of Nebula Pavilion.

Ling Xuanxuan wore an eye catching, short orange skirt and her snow white wrists were adorned with several silver bands. A cute smile also appeared on her lovely, innocent, and beautiful face.

Within the Ling Family, Ling Xuanxuan held an extremely high status as Second Miss and thus sometimes acted capriciously. However, she couldn’t act like that here.

On the way over, Ling Chengzhi had constantly reminded her to restrain her temper upon entering Icestone City, lest it brought upon them unnecessary troubles.

“We have already said that Elder Han isn’t here, please come again.” These gate guards had long since been instructed by Du Haitian’s people. At this moment, they emotionlessly said without a hint of emotion on their faces, “Furthermore, neither of you are the Ling Family’s Patriarch. Even if Elder Han was here, it isn’t definite that he would meet you.”

“How can you guys be like this? With great effort we made the trip over from the Ling Family. You guys didn’t even leave to ask, how do you know whether or not Elder Han is here?” cried Ling Xuanxuan, gnashing her teeth.

Even two of Nebula Pavilion’s guards dared to be so arrogant towards them. This meant that in their eyes the Ling Family was simply nothing worth noticing.

Ling Xuanxuan felt a great sense of humiliation as she too realized that vassal forces truly didn’t enjoy any kind of good treatment.

“We know he isn’t here, this is enough reason.” One of the guards blankly looked at her. Laughingly, he said, “Little sister, it is not that this big brother here doesn’t want to help you, it is that there is just truly no way for me to. Hm, what about staying within Icestone City for a while and waiting for Elder Han to return? I will notify you when he does. Hehe, however, my shift’s rotation is during the day, and I only have the nights free. I wonder if little sister has any free time during the night?”

The young, beautiful Ling Xuanxuan had clearly brought the two guards happiness. The two of them were speaking one after the other, smiling as they flirted with her, but they were resolute with their stance upon the matter of meeting with Elder Han.

Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan stood in front of the gate and argued with the guards for a long period of time until their throats became hoarse, but they weren't able to achieve anything.

Along the road many practitioners of Nebula Pavilion were entering and exiting the gate.

These people, upon hearing that the people at the gate were from some vassal force, acted indifferently, only glancing at Ling Xuanxuan's beauty. However, some joined the guards in ridiculing the two of them before walking away, laughing.

——Not a single person held the Ling Family in their eyes.

"Even if you two stay here until dark, you two still wouldn't be able to meet Elder Han. You might as well quickly return to the Ling Family and tell your patriarch to make his own trip here." After a while, the two guards also became bored and their tones gradually became rude, "Stop blocking the gates! Otherwise, don't blame me for being uncourteous!"

"Eh?! Young Master Zhi, are you going out to drink? You seem really energetic today! Haha, you will definitely be killer tonight!"

One of the guards, upon seeing a little fatty come out from within, immediately beamed with a flattering smile.

As he moved his body to the side, he waved at Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan as if he were swatting flies, trying to get them to make way for the little fatty to pass through.

“Mn, hurry and make way. Young Master Zhi has an appointment to meet with people at Drunken Fragrance Garden. Don’t waste his time.”

Kang Zhi wore brocaded yellow clothes and posed with a fan in his hand, which he waved every once in awhile. Squinting his small eyes, he slowly walked over.

Upon seeing him come over the nearby practitioners of Nebula Pavilion who were entering and leaving immediately took the initiative to avoid him and let him pass.

“You two from the Ling Family, scram farther away, don’t you dare block Young Master Zhi’s way!” shouted a guard.

Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan’s expressions became increasingly ugly. Upon hearing the guards yell, they didn’t dare reply and could only move their bodies.

They had stayed around for so long, but the two of them had yet to see the guards treat anyone with such an attitude. Thus, the two of them immediately knew that the young fatty wearing yellow

clothes was definitely someone with an extraordinary background.

"Ling Family?" Kang Zhi, who had already pretentiously walked through the south gate, suddenly became stunned. Afterwards, he turned around and hesitantly looked over at Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan asking, "Are you of the Ling Family within the southern parts of the Arctic Mountain Range? The ones that have an Herb Mountain... is that you all?"

Ling Chengzhi slightly lowered his head, feeling extremely strange within his heart. Smiling apologetically, he replied, "We are indeed from that Ling Family."

"Slap!"

Kang Zhi suddenly walked over and casually slapped the face of the guard who had told Ling Chengzhi to scram, causing blood to fly out from the corner of his mouth and splatter across the ground.

Afterwards, he viciously kicked the other guard, causing the guard to clutch his stomach and crouch on the ground in pain with cold sweat appearing on the guard's face.

The several practitioners who had been waiting to enter and leave suddenly froze, all of them stopping to observe.

Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan also stayed. They didn't know why the little fatty suddenly became furious, but upon seeing those

emotionless guards being hit so mercilessly, the uncle and niece both felt extremely delighted.

"Let's see if your mouths'll be dirty again!" After hitting the two, a smile appeared on Kang Zhi's chubby face. As if he had become another person, he said, "What did you come to Nebula Pavilion for?"

"We were looking for Elder Han to explain the issue with supplying spirit plants. The two of them said Elder Han wasn't within Nebula Pavilion, and told us..." explained Ling Chengzhi.

After listening, Kang Zhi's chubby face hardened as he turned back around towards the two guards and hit them again. As he hit them, the corners of his mouth drew back and he scolded them, "Are you two tired of living? Uncle Han is clearly within the pavilion, are both your doggy eyes blind?"

The two guards didn't dare to dodge, shirking beside the door as they suffered Kang Zhi's trampling. Within their hearts, they cursed all eighteen generations of ancestors of Du Haitian's messenger.

"Han Yu!" Kang Zhi pointed towards someone within the pavilion and instructed them, "Bring them to meet your uncle."

"Sure, Young Master Zhi." A smiling youth walked up.

"I still have some matters to attend to, so I cannot accompany

you," said Kang Zhi with a brilliant smile. Suddenly, he asked, "Is Ling Lie, that guy, still doing well?"

"Ling Lie?" Ling Chengzhi suddenly became dazed as he robotically nodded and replied, "Doing well, doing well."

"Haha, when you see him in the future, tell him to hurry over to Nebula Pavilion and that the brothers are all thinking about him." The little fatty smiled as he said this sentence, then waved and finally made his leave.

Han Yu brought the puzzled and confused Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan into the depths of the pavilion. As for the two guards who had been scoffing at them earlier, they had been beaten black and blue and were now crouched in the corner of the gate, their heads timidly looking down.

"Excuse me, that Young Master Zhi... what kind of status does he have?" suddenly asked Ling Chengzhi.

"He is our Vice Pavilion Master's son," replied Han Yu with a bitter smile, as if he had once lost something to Kang Zhi. "For you two to have received the favor of Young Master Zhi is truly not easy, that guy's temper is incredibly strange. Uh, in a moment, when you guys meet my uncle, it would be best if you guys said this beforehand. As long as it isn't some incredibly difficult matter, my uncle will definitely help you solve it."

Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan's expressions suddenly became shocked, and they could each see the shock within the

other's eyes as well.

Nebula Pavilion consisted of a Pavilion Master, two Vice Pavilion Master, Elders, Hall Masters, and other positions. There was only one Pavilion Master and a total of two Vice Pavilion Masters. Thus, one could imagine just how much power a Vice Pavilion Master of Nebula Pavilion held. Kang Zhi, as the son of Vice Pavilion Master Kang Hui, naturally had the qualifications to act arrogant and domineering.

The Ling Family had been suppressed to the point of not being able to raise their heads by Du Haitian, was but an elder of Nebula Pavilion. Amongst the five elders, he was towards the back, and his status and ranking were extremely incomparable with that of Vice Pavilion Master Kang Hui. Although Kang Zhi didn't know that the guards had been directed by Du Haitian, even if he did know, he wouldn't have cared.

Before long, Han Yu led the two into a hall lined with bookshelves that had been filled to the brim.

Elder Han Qingrui, the elder specifically responsible for managing the tributes of vassal forces, was just about to leave when he saw them walk over. At first his face was full of annoyance, but upon hearing that it was the Ling Family, his attitude shockingly changed.

"What is the matter?" asked Han Qingrui with a smile as he personally brewed two cups of tea and signaled for Han Yu to leave.

Ling Chengzhi, with a face full of surprise, fearfully and apprehensively explained the matter, saying, “As of recent, Herb Mountain’s spirit plants are no longer withering. As long as you can tolerate it for a few more days, we will definitely be able to fulfill our Ling Family’s payment.”

“And I had thought that it was some big matter.” Han Qingrui waved his hand, indicating for the two to sit down and drink their tea. Afterwards, he laughed and said, “I will notify you right now, starting from this moment onwards, the Ling Family doesn’t have to pay any spirit plants for the next two years!”

As soon as he said those words, the two were shocked to the point where they almost jumped out of their seats, the tea all spilling out of the cups they were holding. Ling Chengzhi hurriedly said, “Elder Han, please don’t be like this. My Ling Family will definitely pay enough spirit plant, please rest assured!”

Han Qingrui was surprised for a moment, then immediately realized that they had misunderstood. Smiling, he explained, “Your Ling Family’s Ling Lie has achieved great merits. His contributions have not only gained a great amount of contribution points for himself, but also for the Ling Family. Thus, you all don’t have to pay spirit plants for the next two years. This was a rule that was set down in the early years of Nebula Pavilion. If any practitioner from a vassal force achieves great merit, then as a reward, the family they belong to will not have to pay tributes for two years.”

“Elder Han! Elder Han!” shouted someone from outside.

Han Qingrui stood up and said with a smile, “I have other matters to attend to, and thus I will not say more. I have already added Ling Lie’s name into the booklet for core members along with a total of one thousand two hundred contribution points. When the two of you return, tell him he can enter Nebula Pavilion at any time.”

As Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan were still dazed like wooden roosters, Han Qingrui continued, “Also, please thank him in my place. As of recent, my child has constantly spoke of him, saying that if it weren’t for him, he might already have died at the hands of the people from Shattered Ice Manor.”

Stopping, Han Qingrui smiled as he patted Ling Chengzhi on the shoulder. Leaving them to finish their tea break, he left first to see to his own matter.

“...Ling Lie. Within our Ling Family, there is only one person called Ling Lie, and isn’t he an old man with one foot in the grave?” asked Ling Chengzhi dazedly as if he were dreaming. It was a kind of unbelievable feeling.

“Core member! One thousand two hundred contribution points! Did they get the wrong person?” Ling Xuanxuan’s heart had been thrown into a mess as if she had become drunk. Her mind felt dizzy, unable to discern North, South, East, and West.

“I’m afraid... I’m afraid they did indeed get the wrong person,” Ling Chengzhi said helplessly.

Chapter 19: Seclusion

Since Ling Chengye no longer forbade family members from entering Herb Mountain's caves, it suddenly became very lively.

Every day there were many people from the Ling Family who entered to investigate with confidence and hope, but the results were all the same; it was a fruitless pursuit.

Even people like Ling Chengye and Du Qishan, who had reached the Natal Opening Realm, weren't able to avoid getting lost in the mysterious formations; it was even more impossible for the rest of the people to successfully walk into the depths of the stone cave.

Following one failure after another, many people gradually changed their strategy and treated Qin Lie as the key to proceed.

From then on, there were many Ling Family members who waited for Qin Lie early in the morning with hopes of entering Herb Mountain with him, following in right behind Qin Lie in order to successfully enter its depths.

Unfortunately, every time they ventured into the stone cave, they would suddenly get lost and become unable to see Qin Lie's trail. There were obviously illusory formations and mist formations existing inside the stone cave, preventing the people who entered from seeing the people by their side.

After a few tries, people slowly started giving up. Even though they were still full of curiosity towards Qin Lie within their hearts,

they slowly gave up after being unable to successfully tag along with him.

Ling Chengye, knowing well of Du Jiaolan's petty and small-minded personality, was afraid that she would attempt to eliminate Qin Lie, so he ordered Ling Feng and Ling Ying to accompany Qin Lie every day when entering and exiting Herb Mountain, preventing him from being assassinated on the way.

Ling Chengye's arrangement caused Du Jiaolan to not be able to find an opportunity. Her hatred towards the Ling Family members grew, and she saw Qin Lie as a thorn in her side.

After the engagement ceremony ended, Ling Yushi visited Qin Lie even more frequently. Sometimes she would bring food early in the morning so Qin Lie no longer had to go to the Ling Family's dining hall for his meals.

By evening, when Qin Lie returned, he often found that she was there before him.

The more Ling Yushi did the chores, such as preparing bathing water, folding sheets, cleaning, and tidying, the more she became skilled at them. She also kept her nagging habit, so Qin Lie knew every tiny thing about the Ling Town like the palm of his hand.

Sometimes, Ling Yushi would suddenly become silent and use both hands to support her crystal-clear chin. Her beautiful eyes gleamed while looking at him, seeming like she wanted to see through the secret he was hiding within the depths of his heart.

Whenever she did this, Qin Lie would suddenly become nervous, and he would cautiously keep his expression calm.

Ling Yushi would sometimes sigh softly from disappointment and sometimes shake her head and laugh uncontrollably which made Qin Lie unable to guess her inner thoughts.

Qin Lie's daily cultivation didn't change even though Herb Mountain became lively. He still continued assiduously and never slacked off.

Another day passed.

Deep within the vast cavern system of Herb Mountain, Qin Lie sat down while leaning against a stone pillar. He held his breath, focused his mind, and cultivated with the help of the Umbra Lightning Condor beast cores.

The floor around him was covered with gray, powdered fragments; they were slowly formed when beast cores exploded after having their energy completely absorbed.

Unconsciously, of the more than forty pieces of beast cores obtained from hunting in the Solitary Ridge, he only had a few remaining. Not only that, the few stalks of Ice Stalk Grass that he had gathered had already been exhausted.

After an uncertain number time, another beast core in his hands

crumbled to dust. His expression was serious as he silently circulated his power.

A trace of spirit energy was transferred out of his dantian's spirit sea, slowly flowed through his muscles and veins, and trickled and gathered towards his left arm. The spirit energy in his muscles and veins immediately started to speed up and rushed towards his left hand's index finger like a violent, stormy wave!

"Bzzt bzzt bzzt!"

A strange electric flowing sound was coming from the pulp of his index finger. His finger was in extreme pain from the swelling of spirit energy, and it was bright red as if it had been burned by fire.

"Bang!"

The surging spirit energy seemed to have collided into an invisible barrier. It couldn't break through the pulp of his finger and suddenly rescinded back into his palm, causing his hand to suddenly go completely numb and lose all sensation.

"Still no good..."

Qin Lie slowly opened his eyes and waved his left hand. His handsome face was filled with traces of anxiety and helplessness.

Recently, his spirit energy within his dantian's spirit sea had become more plentiful with the help of the beast cores, so he

prepared to charge into the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Unfortunately, he tried breaking through a few times, but each attempt resulted in failure.

The Refinement Realm was divided into nine levels. The first six levels were comparatively easy to cultivate. It was mainly focusing on gathering spirit energy, opening up the spirit sea, and then continuously using spirit energy to nourish the flesh and slowly strengthen the muscles and veins, so it was easier to break through the first six levels.

During this period, when martial practitioners fight against others, they rely mainly on the toughness of their bodies. They couldn't use spirit skills and are not able to discharge their spirit energy to harm or kill others.

The reason for this was because martial practitioners at this level could not release their spirit energy through their body, so they were not able to "emit spirit energy."

With their spirit energy trapped inside their body, it means they won't have lethality and could not pour it into spirit artifacts that significantly increase a martial practitioner's combat ability.

Only after breaking through to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm would martial practitioners would be able discharge the spirit energy in their bodies through every single part of their body in order to use it offensively, kill their enemies, or pour their spirit energy into spirit artifacts to unleash their frightening power.

Martial practitioners at this level could also refine their bones, marrows, and organs to make their bodies even tougher.

Because of this, the sixth and seventh level of the Refinement Realm were considered a watershed. Even though there was only a difference of one level, they were separated by a huge chasm.

When he fought with the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor back then, it looked like he had lightning coiling all around his body, but that lightning was not really “spirit energy emission,” it was lightning from the sky that landed on his body, guided by his spirit energy. That lightning was mostly from nature’s power.

Without thunder and lightning striking down from the sky, he would not able to achieve this step. In the future when he engages in combat, he would not be able to count on both thunder and lightning to be there every time, so he needed to break through to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm as soon as possible.

The seventh level of the Refinement Realm could also will spirit energy to pervade the bones, marrows, and organs, which could help him cultivate his Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

In many people’s eyes, only those who have stepped into the seventh level of the Refinement Realm could be counted as true martial practitioners; those below the sixth level could only be referred to as martial artists.

The reason why Ling Ying admired Ling Feng was also because he broke through to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. He was a true martial practitioner the Ling Family's young generation.

"I must cross this threshold as soon as possible!" Qin Lie rested for a little bit, just until the soreness and numbness from his left hand decreased. Then, he took out another Umbra Lightning Condor beast core. "There are only three left. I must hurry up and breakthrough. The rest of the spirit pills and stones that I brought back from the Arctic Mountain Range can only be used with at the seventh level."

He only gave part of the spirit pills and stones that he got from the martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor away as a betrothal gift. There were still some remaining in the mountain caves, which he had saved for himself.

"Zzzt Zzzt Zzzt!!"

After a while, a loud crisp sound came from his finger, as if it was going to break. However, the spirit energy that was pouring in seemed to be blocked by a hydrovalve. It couldn't charge out of the pulp of his finger to be released at all.

Inside the cave, Qin Lie charged and charged, tried and tried, but he failed every single time.

"This is not efficient enough, it's still no good. There has to be a better way." Qin Lie narrowed his eyes, locked his eyebrows, and

was deep in thought. Suddenly his heart and mind flinched, and he cried out in a low voice, “Soul Suppressing Orb! Thoughtless Tranquility!”

Without caring whether or not he would not be able to wake up for a long time, he took a deep breath, focused his mind and consciousness, and slowly felt a wisp of his soul floating out from his head, flying towards the Soul Suppressing Orb.

As time passed, he gathered even more of his soul consciousness and continuously aggregated all of it within the Soul Suppressing Orb.

The Soul Suppressing Orb hidden in the center of his forehead started shining remotely as if it was a pitch-black eyeball.

In the cave, the Soul Suppressing Orb was emitting a dim, flickering luster, and it seemed extremely mysterious and strange.

Slowly, the sensation of his soul leaving his body came once more, and it seemed like his soul was in a murky space within the Soul Suppressing Orb. He could see every movement of his body. He could even control his body to carry out some simple movements and have his body cultivate instinctively...

In that mysterious space, he actually could clearly see the spirit energy of the world in the cave converging towards his body, at a very high rate. He could even see the spirit energy that was thin like a light mist leisurely flowing into his body through his small pores.

The pores that he couldn't see regardless of how much he widened his eyes were magnified several times in this state; they was so clear that it was inconceivable!

In this strange and unpredictable Thoughtless Tranquility state, his soul was in the state of departure, but his understanding towards his own body was deep to an unimaginable extent!

In this state, it was as if he managed to resonate with heaven and earth, and could attract and gather even more spirit energy...

With his soul hidden inside the Soul Suppressing Orb, Qin Lie watched his body instinctively cultivate, and he also watched the spirit energy flowing within his muscles and veins speed up, charging towards the tip of his finger each time!

He found that as the time he cultivated in this state increased, the wall that was keeping him from stepping into the seventh level of the Refinement Realm seemed to become thinner and thinner.

His mind sharpened, slowly understanding that cultivating in the Thoughtless Tranquility state caused spirit energy to gather faster, and the speed that it flowed within his muscles and veins became even faster as well.

Cultivating like this through his instincts, his body could automatically adjust itself, adjust to its optimal state. It was so magical that he felt that his soul's existence was unnecessary.

It was so wondrous that it couldn't be described with words!

"RIIP!"

After an uncertain amount time, a streak of blue lightning suddenly shot out from the tip of his finger. The lightning beam flashed and disappeared instantly, then shattered a piece of the rock on the stone wall in front of him.

When his wavering soul saw that flash of lightning, he was elated. He then struggled with all his might, relying on the agitation and excitement within his heart to repeatedly attack the orb.

"BOOM!"

His head was suddenly jolted, and then the feeling of his soul returning suddenly flooded his mind.

Qin Lie woke up instantly.

Over the past five years, this was the first time he didn't need the help of external stimulation; he relied on his own willpower to escape from the state of Thoughtless Tranquility!

"Hehehe." Qin Lie sat there with his mouth opened and couldn't stop smiling idiotically.

With the help of the Thoughtless Tranquility state, not only did he successfully break through into the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, he also discovered more about the wondrous points of the Thoughtless Tranquility state. Furthermore, he now gained a newfound ability to escape from it. This increased his confidence significantly, as if he saw a grand, magnificent future.

“Rrrm! Rrrm!”

The rumbling sound of his stomach woke him from his excitement. Only then did he realize that his body was thin and shriveled; he was clueless as to how long he had been starving for.

Because it had been so long since he had last eaten, his steps were a bit unsteady. He held on to the stone wall and slowly walked out of the cave with a pale complexion.

At the entrance of the cave, Ling Yushi’s face was haggard. Her eyes were filled with unresolved worry. She looked into the distance, leaning on the wall while keeping watch for who knew how long.

Chapter 20: Who Is That Amazing Person?

It was sunset. Ling Yushi, garbed in a long, emerald skirt, was facing the cave mouth, her silhouette slender and exquisite. But her eyes appeared unfocused, and there was no radiance to be seen from her face either.

Qin Lie stopped in his tracks and stared indifferently at her beautiful silhouette. After a moment, he purposefully added weight to his footsteps.

Abruptly, Ling Yushi awoke from her dream-like trance and turned her head around, startled. The dimness in her eyes was instantly replaced by a bright glow.

“What took you so long? It has almost been four days; how did you hold out this long without food or water?” she cried out in a low voice as she rushed towards Qin Lie with a terribly worried look. “Quick, drink some water first. I’ve also brought some cooked meat; it should be enough to sate the hunger a bit.”

Ling Yushi hurriedly handed over the waterskin she brought along with her.

At this point, Qin Lie was so hungry and thirsty that he could die, so he immediately accepted the water skin and guzzled down its contents for a short burst of time. Once he caught his breath, he then grabbed the cooked beef and began wolfing it down like a beast.

After a long while, Qin Lie finally satiated himself completely, and as he relaxed, he turned around and saw Ling Yushi still knitting her eyebrows in a worried frown.

"Really, if you're going to wall yourself in a cave for four days straight, you could've at least given me a warning so I could prepare enough food and water. You really scared me, you know? I thought you were going to starve to death..." Ling Yushi muttered under her breath as she gently wiped the crumbs of meat off his shirt. "Let's go home soon and get you a bath, okay? You're stinking quite a bit; god knows what you were doing inside."

Qin Lie's expression remained completely vacant. He allowed her to tidy up his clothing and wipe the dust off his face, and he felt a warm feeling flowing through his heart. After they left the cave, Qin Lie realized that it was already late evening and that there weren't any Ling family members to be seen around the cave entrance. It was a sign that that they were slowly giving up on the search.

"First Miss! We're over here!"

At the bottom of the hill, Ling Ying was waving her hands widely at Ling Yushi from beside a rock. Ling Feng stood beside her – the duo had been recently paired together to prevent any assassination attempts by the Du Family on Qing Lie's life.

The evening sky, aglow with crimson hues and burning fire-like lights, was so brilliant that even the mountains became painted in red.

The quartet trekked down the mountain path underneath the red glow.

Qin Lie looked as vacant as ever. Ling Ying was both cheerful and energetic, and she would sneak peeks at Qin Lie from time to time while chatting to Ling Yushi with a bright smile. Ling Feng simply smiled with a calm look on his face, listening but never interrupting the conversation with an opinion.

“First Miss, have you taken the Hundred Vein Pill and Sea Opening Pill? Are the effects as miraculous as they say?” Ling Ying suddenly inquired with great interest. She sneaked a glance at the youth beside her, as if wondering how Qin Lie even came across such valuable cultivation spirit pills.

Even Ling Feng’s curiosity was piqued as he turned to look seriously at Ling Yushi, paying great attention to her every word.

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Ling Yushi looked towards Qin Lie while betraying a hint of gratitude from her eyes. She then answered casually, “I’ve been making some preparations to take the Hundred Vein Pill as of late. As for the Sea Opening Pill… it’s still a little too early to take it at the moment, so I plan to leave it until the ninth level of Refinement. My cultivation talent isn’t as good as you guys’, so without the pills, it might be a little difficult for me to break into the Natal Opening Realm.” She smiled lightly in self-derision.

“First Miss, you are too modest.” Ling Feng straightened himself

and said seriously, “In my opinion First Miss’ cultivation talent is actually not weaker than Second Miss’. It’s just that First Miss was burdened with the family’s matters at an earlier time, thus you couldn’t focus all your energy into cultivating itself. Moreover, it may be possible that the Patriarch favored Second Miss more in terms of cultivation resources, which is why First Miss and Second Miss are of the same realm.”

“You don’t need to console me; I know that my talent isn’t as good as hers.” Ling Yushi smiled and continued, “I can see that both your talents are pretty exceptional within the Ling Family. If the two of you can keep up the hard work, it may not be an impossible task to enter Nebula Pavilion in the future.”

The moment Nebula Pavilion was mentioned, both Ling Ying and Ling Feng betrayed an obvious look of yearning from their eyes.

In their hearts, Nebula Pavilion was the holy cultivation site of their dreams, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that being able to practice cultivation in Nebula Pavilion was their ultimate dream.

Ling Yushi and the rest continued to chat on the way.

The quartet arrived back at Ling Town just when the day was about to turn dark. The moment they passed through the town entrance, they received word that Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan had returned from their travels.

“The moment the Third Master returned, he immediately went

off with the Patriarch to the east end of the town, where Ling Lie's house is. Ling Lie is already over seventy years old, and he has been bedridden for years. I do not know what business the Patriarch has at his house."

Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and Ling Ying were all confused by the situation, but only Qin Lie felt a small bit of surprise as he recalled the reason why Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan went to the Nebula Pavilion and connected the dots. He couldn't help but remember Tu Ze's little party and thought: They couldn't have run into Du Zhe and the others, could they?

"I'll go over and have a look. Ling Feng, Ling Ying, please send Qin Lie back to his house first." With doubts at the back of her mind, she left a parting instruction and hurriedly left for the town's east entrance.

When she arrived at Ling Lie's home, she saw Ling Chengye, Ling Chengzhi, and Ling Xuanxuan just walking out of the house. Ling Chengye and his brother appeared to be very disappointed as they shook their heads repeatedly.

The moment Ling Xuanxuan saw her coming towards them, her expression suddenly became wrought with agitation. In fact, she looked like she was about to cry.

"Daddy, what are you…?" Ling Yushi questioned in a sweet tone.

"We'll talk when we get back home." Ling Chengye waved his hands slightly.

A long while later, when the whole family was gathered in the living room, Ling Xuanxuan cried out with a pair of eyes that had long since been brimming with tears, “Big sis! Who told you to take my place and become engaged with that fool?”

“It was my own wish.” Ling Yushi smiled lightly.

“And who in their right mind would willingly be engaged with him?!” Ling Xuanxuan had been holding herself back all this time, but she finally couldn’t take it any longer and exploded in tears. “He’s only a fool! Why would you wrong yourself so? Did daddy force you to do this?”

“Be quiet!” Ling Chengye yelled angrily. “You’ve been to Nebula Pavilion and seen with your own eyes how they treat us! Do you think we, the Ling Family mean anything in their eyes? At least your sister knows how to make sacrifices for the family, but what do you know about responsibility? It’ll be enough if you would stop making more trouble for the family!”

Ling Xuanxuan had seldom seen him this mad before, so she was cowered immediately. As she recalled their encounters at Nebula Pavilion, she too bowed her head and wept silently.

“Either Nebula Pavilion was wrong, or this... ‘Ling Lie’ is someone else entirely!” Ling Chengzhi suddenly said.

“What’s going on?” Ling Yushi asked him.

“Oh, your third uncle ran into something strange when they were at Nebula Pavilion…” The Ling Family Patriarch explained the whole thing from beginning to end before continuing, “Han Qingrui, or Elder Han of Nebula Pavilion, informed us that not only has our family been absolved of any tribute of spirit plants for the next two years, he even said that Ling Lie had done them a great service and was thus registered straight into Nebula Pavilion’s core member list, in addition to being rewarded one thousand and two hundred contribution points! If it wasn’t for this ‘Ling Lie’ person, your third uncle and your sister probably wouldn’t even be able to get through the front door! Perhaps they may have been humiliated even further…”

Ling Yushi’s pretty face turned into an expression full of shock as she cried out, “Ah! Not only was he ranked among the core members instantly, he even obtained this many Nebula Pavilion contribution points? Since when did our family produce such an amazing person?”

“Ling Town only has one Ling Lie, and we just visited him. He’s been bedridden for almost two years, and frankly, it’s a miracle he’s still alive. He told us that he hadn’t left the town for ten years, so there’s no way it could be him. But then again, there’s no one else in the Ling Family who is called ‘Ling Lie,’ not even one with the character ‘Lie’ in their name…” muttered the Ling Family Patriarch as he frowned deeply and shook his head.

“Big brother, do you think it’s possible that… Qin Lie is that person? His name does have a ‘Lie’ character in it, doesn’t it?” Ling Chengzhi said suddenly.

“That fool is an odd one alright, but that ‘oddness’ has nothing to do with anything amazing at all! How can it possibly be him?” Ling Xuanxuan broke away from her crying and sneered with a face full of tears and disdain. “If someone like him can become a core member in Nebula Pavilion and obtain this many contribution points, then anyone in the Ling Family can join Nebula Pavilion whenever they feel like it! If he really were this capable, I would’ve agreed to the engagement long ago!”

Ever since she heard that Ling Yushi had gotten engaged with Qin Lie, she could no longer even listen to his name without feeling intense loathing and revulsion.

“Ling Lie, Qin Lie…”

The patriarch looked thoughtful for a moment before he waved lightly for Ling Xuanxuan to leave and argue somewhere else. After she left, only then did he lower his voice and say, “It might actually be possible. If you remember the engagement ceremony, his betrothal gifts smacked the Du household real good in the face. The more I think about it, the more I feel that Qin Lie isn’t as simple as he seems. If we really have to make a guess, then he probably is the most suspicious.”

“I also do not think that Qin Lie is an average person.” Ling Chengzhi agreed and nodded. “There are only so many things a fool can do and so many coincidences. It’s possible that he maybe hiding something; maybe his head really does go awry sometimes. If you tell me that he was foolish this entire time, however… I’m not sure I believe that anymore.”

Ever since Qin Lie had awakened, there had been more and more abnormalities as of late, and Qin Lie's cover was also slipping little by little. The Ling brothers weren't stupid after all, and they were slowly but surely noticing a pattern and how there must be a mystery surrounding Qin Lie.

As Ling Yushi listened to the two of them converse, her beautiful eyes gleamed, the hint of a tiny smile escaping her lips. Suddenly she was feeling much better.

"Little Shi, keep an eye on him. If you find anything, tell us immediately!" Ling Chengzhi ordered.

"Ah!" The yell jolted Ling Yushi right out of her pretty dreams, and she quickly nodded her head and responded softly, "Yes, yes..."

"This girl. What were you thinking?" Ling Chengzhi frowned.

"Nothing, nothing. If there's nothing else, then I'll be on my way." Ling Yushi stuck her tongue out cutely before leaving the room with excited eyes. After she grabbed some food from the dining hall, she hurriedly made her way to Qin Lie's stone house.

Inside the stone house, Qin Lie had his eyes closed on the bed and was attempting to enter the state of Thoughtless Tranquility.

Perhaps because he had ascended to a higher level or because his

mind consciousness was much greater than before, it was now significantly faster for him to enter the state of Thoughtless Tranquility. Even breaking free of it wasn't that hard of a task anymore.

The ability to enter or exit the wondrous cultivation state of Thoughtless Tranquility could dramatically increase the efficiency at which he practiced cultivation, and it gave near insurmountable benefits as he continued to break through the path of martial arts. That was why he valued this ability greatly.

Moreover, he also had a faint feeling that repeatedly entering and exiting the state of Thoughtless Tranquility could refine his soul and consciousness.

This discovery inspired him greatly!

After all, his mind consciousness was the key strength to unlocking the Soul Suppressing Orb's seal. Whether or not he could recover his memories from ten years ago lied entirely on the strength of his mind consciousness, and thus he wasn't bored. He was even gladdened as he attempted to get in and out of Thoughtless Tranquility again and again.

He successfully broke out of Thoughtless Tranquility again, just before Ling Yushi arrived. Listening to her springy footsteps, Qin Lie felt surprised and wondered what made Ling Yushi so happy.

The moment Ling Yushi entered, she immediately became fixated on his figure, an odd sparkle in those beautiful eyes of hers.

Qin Lie's heart immediately tightened at her reaction.

"Since we're already engaged, we no longer need to avoid certain things now, do we? Hmm, let me help you wash your back today."

Ling Yushi stared deeply at him with bright eyes and a little cunning smile, like a little fox devising something in the dark.

Qin Lie instantly froze.

Chapter 21: Four Spirit Diagrams

If Ling Yushi, garbed in long, emerald skirt, had looked dark and spiritless at the entrance to the cave earlier, now her eyes sparkled with a beautiful brightness, and the corner of her lips curled into an enigmatic smile.

“I brought you something to eat. Let’s fill up your stomach and talk later.” She orderly set out the dishes and took out the food from the basket. Smiling at Qin Lie, she said, “Take it easy while I prepare the hot water. Once you’ve finished you can come in.” Then, she leisurely entered the washroom.

Qin Lie rubbed the bottom of his chin as his gaze turned odd. He guessed that she must have made the connection after hearing the name “Ling Lie” from Ling Chengzhi and came over after that with the purpose to probe him.

That was in fact the truth.

Ling Yushi too was gradually starting to notice his unusualness. After listening to Ling Chengye and his brother, she began to feel that it was more and more likely that Qin Lie was purposely acting like a fool and hence decided that she would test him. By being more intimate with Qin Lie, she wanted to see if she could notice anything amiss and expose Qin Lie.

A little while later, Qin Lie devoured every last bit of the food and looked towards the washroom. Smiling bitterly, he forced himself up from his seat.

In truth, he wasn't afraid that some of his secrets might be exposed to the public.

In his opinion, the only reason he continued to act crazy and foolish was because he didn't want to get involved in too many of the Ling family's issues. He didn't want the Ling household to come looking for him, asking about what was inside Herb Mountain, his grandfather, himself, or other matters.

By continuing to act foolish, no one would bother him and he could focus more into cultivation.

But judging from the current situation, it would probably get harder and harder to continue pretending the way he was. A few members of the Ling family had already noticed something amiss, and even Ling Yushi had taken the initiative and came over to probe him. He understood that he couldn't hide the truth for much longer.

"Luckily for me though, I am now able to enter and exit the state of Thoughtless Tranquility as I please. Otherwise, I wouldn't even be able to get past today's spectacle," Qin Lie thought to himself silently. Taking in a breath, he then entered the washroom with a vacant expression.

Inside the steaming stone room, Ling Yushi stood prettily beside a big wooden barrel with a gentle smile on her elegant face. She pushed up her sleeves to reveal a pair of arms that were as white as snow, and amidst the thin veil of mist, she appeared to be both

incredibly beautiful and attractive.

She grabbed a towel with one hand and beckoned Qin Lie with the other, saying, “The hot water’s ready. Come over and take off your clothes. Then you can get inside and take a nice, long dip.”

This situation made Qin Lie feel like he was facing a terrible enemy.

Without waiting for Ling Yushi to “lend him a hand,” he took the initiative and took off his outer shirt himself. Under the gaze of those beautiful eyes, he then took off his long pants and finally stood with only his underpants on at the entrance.

Ling Yushi’s eyes shone with an odd brightness, her heart trembling slightly and her lips curled into a graceful arc as she watched Qin Lie’s near naked body. Blushing slightly, she cried out softly, “You look thin with your clothes on, but without them... you are actually pretty muscular, aren’t you? Not bad, you have a fine body.”

Since Qin Lie had trained himself strenuously for years, on the outside he appeared to be both thin and gaunt. However, once he exposed himself, there was nothing to hide the well trained and powerful body he had built for himself.

Every muscle on his body could be seen as clear as day, and they were incredibly well distributed and matched up to his body almost perfectly!

In fact, it seemed that only these well trained muscles could properly display his body's strength, speed, and endurance at perfect equilibrium. If his muscles were a tiny bit smaller, it seemed that his explosive power would be lacking. If his muscles were a tiny bit bigger, then his speed and responsiveness would be affected instead.

As the first miss of the Ling Family, Ling Yushi often acted as a supervisor at the martial arts arena and had seen countless half-naked men. She secretly compared them to Qin Lie and felt that his body seemed more suited for combat even though she couldn't figure out exactly why. She just felt that Qin Lie's body was both well balanced and coordinated and also very soothing to the eye.

While she zoned out for a little, Qin Lie jumped off the stone stairs, and with a "plop," he landed inside the barrel. He immediately entered the state of Thoughtless Tranquility and kept his soul adrift to keep Ling Yushi from noticing anything amiss.

"Why didn't you take off everything? Are you embarrassed?" Ling Yushi pouted. When she said those words, she too felt embarrassed from the bottom of her heart.

After Qin Lie dipped himself into the large wooden barrel, with the towel she had grabbed, she walked over until she was behind Qin Lie. Watching Qin Lie's back, she felt her cheeks turn warm amidst the mist, and after struggling internally, she finally grit her teeth and said, "Let me help you…" while pretending to be calm.

With that, she dipped the towel into the barrel. Once the towel was soaked with hot water, she began washing Qin Lie's back.

Every now and then her soft palm and delicate fingers would come in direct contact with Qin Lie's back. Even with his soul adrift, Qin Lie was excited to the core.

"Splash splash splash!"

Holding the towel and scrubbing Qin Lie's back, it didn't take long for Ling Yushi to arrive in front of Qin Lie after scrubbing his back.

Amidst the thin veil of mist, her cheeks flushed red while her eyes were brimming with a terrifying glow as she embarrassedly peeked at Qin Lie occasionally.

Under these circumstances, although Qin Lie was still in the Thoughtless Tranquility state, his body began to react towards its basest instinct...

Although his soul was hidden within the Soul Suppressing Orb, he could see that a little tent had bulged up from his pants. Since his lower body was completely submerged inside the water and his wet underpants were sticking tightly against his stomach, the outline of this little tent had appeared with perfect clarity, and it also appeared to be very... excited.

"Mm..."

Ling Yushi didn't dare to stare at Qin Lie for too long, so she leaned against the barrel and looked down. She immediately saw

the little tent, and suddenly felt blood rushing to her cheeks. In fact, her face was red enough to almost bleed out of her skin. Her eyes seemed to turn misty as she covered her lips and cried out softly.

"Peh!"

Not daring to look down any longer, she made a soft spitting sound and looked up at Qin Lie.

She discovered that Qin Lie's eyes remained as vacant as ever, but there were green veins barely popping to the surface. Not only that, every nerve was taut. They were also pulsing so very slightly as if trying really hard to hold something back.

Taken aback by the sight, Ling Yushi quickly turned her attention back to Qin Lie's back, and after giving it another simple wipe she exited the washroom rapidly with a hint of panic.

She had a feeling that if she continued to stay and test Qin Lie, something bad was going to happen to her.

"I won't be able to come over often for the next few days. I need to take the Hundred Vein Pill and improve my constitution." Her voice trembled slightly as she shouted to Qin Lie, who was still in the washroom. She then slipped out of the house immediately after with her face completely red.

Once out of the stone house, the mountain breeze blew against

her skin and refreshed her mind instantly.

Immediately, her expression turned into one of surprise, and she pressed her hands against her bright red cheeks and smiled derisively, saying, “What’s going on with me? Why should I be scared of him? Haven’t I come here to check if he’s a fool or just faking it? Instead, I turned back at the last moment; I’m so useless...”

Back at the house, inside the wooden barrel.

After a long while, Qin Lie broke out of the Thoughtless Tranquility state and gulped deep breaths repeatedly as if he didn’t have enough air. For a moment there, he had a terrifying feeling that he was going to suffocate himself.

“As I thought, a young body like mine can’t handle any stimulation at all. That was way too close.” He stared towards the door with fear still lingering about his face. Then, he shook his head, smiled wryly, and continued, “You really should stop playing with fire. If you keep this up, I won’t be able to hold back much longer.”

Previously, while his soul was still adrift, he had had a terrifying feeling that his body was about to explode. It was as if there was a flame blazing inside his body, burning him to the point where it felt unbearable for his soul, and he even came close to losing control and slipping right back into his body.

He knew that the moment he broke out of the Thoughtless

Tranquility state, his breathing, his heart rate, his muscle tension, and so on would immediately expose his true state of the mind, thus revealing to Ling Yushi that he definitely wasn't foolish and was no different from any normal man.

"If you keep playing with fire, you're going to get burned~"

After calming himself down for a little while, Qin Lie continued to lie inside the wooden barrel with an odd expression on his face. He was still recalling the wonderful feeling of Ling Yushi's small hands rubbing his skin.

It was a feeling much like electricity pricking into the body, and it had distracted him completely. No matter how much he tried, he just could not calm his heart down.

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The next day, Ling Yushi did not show up as expected, and as usual, it was Ling Feng and Ling Ying who escorted him through Herb Mountain.

Inside the cave, Qin Lie, who had just broken through the seventh level of Refinement, was tirelessly cultivating, and through the wondrous state of Thoughtless Tranquility, he repeatedly assailed his remaining fingers and other parts of his body.

To fully master the seventh level of Refinement, he needed to

reach the point where he could discharge spirit energy from every part of his body.

The ten fingers, the palm, the arms, the shoulders, and so on were all primary points of attack. If a martial practitioner could discharge their spirit energy anytime they wanted, then their combat capabilities would be greatly increased. It would enable a martial practitioner to blast spirit energy into their opponent's body with just a simple shoulder charge or an arm throw to injure or kill their enemies.

What Qin Lie wanted to do right now was to open up every single attack point in his body and enrich his ability to discharge spirit energy.

Under the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, his cultivation efficiency was greatly increased just as he had thought. This was especially so since he could enter and leave the state freely. With each passing day he cultivated, he could feel obvious improvement.

Today, armed with the knowledge that he had improved by leaps and bounds, Qin Lie once again tried attacking the Soul Suppressing Orb's seal in his forehead.

"Boom!"

To his surprise, his mind attack had gone extremely smoothly, and he broke through a seal almost immediately.

As if he had blown open a door, four incredibly complicated and enigmatic diagrams suddenly appeared inside a vast space immediately after he broke through the first seal!

Amidst the vast open space were four diagrams hanging high up in the air, and each massive diagram was so gigantic that they were all at least several hundreds of meters wide feet wide.

Each diagram had countless shiny threads crisscrossing each other as if many gigantic spider webs were pieced together into one. They brimmed with an ancient and complex mysticism, as if they contained the world's most central, fundamental principles and truths.

Beyond the four diagrams was a sealed chaotic area. Qin Lie gave it a look through his soul consciousness and discovered that it seemed to be yet another world, as though that was where his memory fortress truly lied.

Surprisingly, there was more than one seal inside the Soul Suppressing Orb and another appeared behind it after the one before it had been unsealed.

It was like opening a door and entering a whole new world and then realizing that within this new world there was yet another door connecting to an even more mysterious world waiting for him to break through and explore.

"Spirit diagrams! Four spirit diagrams!"

After staring closely at the complex diagrams for a while, Qin Lie suddenly exclaimed in surprise within the vast world.

His grandfather, Qin Shan, was an Artificer. For the past few years his grandfather had often fixed spirit artifacts inside the cave for the Ling Family while he was cultivating. His grandfather knew that he could hear him even when in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, so he would talk nonstop about the principles of artifact forging and expound an endless amount of information, all while fixing spirit artifacts.

According to his grandfather, artifact forging was divided into many little steps such as preparing spirit ingredients, mixing spirit ingredients, and then melting and forging them before fusing them as one. This mixture would then slowly cool down and stabilize into an “artifact,” and finally, the “spirit diagram” would be added into the formed “artifact.” This last step of adding in the spirit diagram was also the most important step of Artifact Forging!

A spirit artifact’s quality and power were not determined solely by how perfectly the spirit ingredients were merged together. The spirit diagram inside the spirit artifact was even more important!.

A mystifying complete spirit diagram could effectively change a spirit artifact and grant it unbelievable power!

A spirit diagram was the core of Artifact Forging, and to master a powerful and mystical spirit diagram would also mean to master the true essence of Artifact Forging!

Chapter 22: Training Hard For Three Months

The four spirit diagrams were like four magnificent mountains hanging high amidst a vast space inside the Soul Suppressing Orb.

The intricate and complex threads crisscrossed and connected with each other to form an extremely complex and mysterious pattern. An indescribable mystique was contained within it.

Qin Lie's mind consciousness flew over and examined one of the huge spirit diagrams, but it didn't take long before his mind wilted, afflicted with a strong sense of fatigue.

He hurriedly withdrew the wisp of consciousness.

In the space that stored the four spirit diagrams, a new world had appeared after the seal had been broken. He only needed to let out a thought and slip into the space that was unlocked if he wanted to examine the mysterious spirit diagrams.

However, if he thoroughly examined any one of the spirit diagrams, he would quickly feel his mind grow tired and it would greatly wound his state of mind as well.

This was different from the state of Thoughtless Tranquility.

In the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, his soul consciousness

would slowly depart from his mind and, in the end, disappear entirely into the Soul Suppressing Orb, entering the Soul Suppressing Orb's outermost layer of space.

The external layer of space was vast and boundless, and a soul would never become fatigued when inside, nor would it ever become dispirited and listless as though it could be sustained for an eternity. It was like falling into a state of deep sleep while also having the wonderful effect of nurturing the soul and mind.

The internal layer of space stored the spirit diagrams, and he only needed a wisp of mind consciousness to enter inside. But the moment he entered, he needed to expend mind energy, and if he paid close attention to those spirit diagrams, he would grow weak and sluggish several times faster than normal. It would only take a moment for him to completely use up the wisp of consciousness he slipped in and for his soul to grow weary.

Mind energy was an incredibly esoteric and mysterious power, and only the soul could sense and use this formless power. Apparently, only high level martial practitioners would truly be familiar with the usage and cultivation methods of mind energy.

Spirit energy was the power born from the cultivation of a martial practitioner's body while mind energy was the power born from the cultivation of the soul.

It was just that low level martial practitioners would find it very hard to detect mind energy, much less cultivate and use it.

Qin Lie's realm of cultivation was quite low, but for some reason he had always been able to sense his mind energy on a deeper level. Perhaps it had something to do with his sealed memories, or perhaps it had something to do with the Soul Suppressing Orb itself...

"Was it Grandpa who left these four spirit diagrams behind? Grandpa is also an Artificer... No, wait. Grandpa once said in a letter that even he couldn't figure out the mysteries behind the Soul Suppressing Orb, so it probably wasn't him... In that case, these spirit diagrams must have already been inside the orb from the very beginning."

After withdrawing his mind consciousness, Qin Lie looked slightly pale, and his handsome face was filled with doubt and confusion. He could not figure out where the four spirit diagrams came from or what they were.

A spirit diagram was the core item for an artificer because they formed the very foundation of the ranking and power of a spirit artifact. These mystical yet marvelous spirit diagrams could greatly increase the power of a spirit artifact and unleash its materials' highest potential!

One could even say that a spirit diagram was a spirit artifact's soul and the very foundation of Artifact Forging for an artificer. It was also the basis that measured how far an artificer would rise!

After resting for a little while, Qin Lie formed yet another wisp of mind energy and continued to venture deeper into the vast space. He began examining the spirit diagram that he was watching

earlier and attempted to engrave it in his heart.

The mind energy was like a sheet of faint luminescence inside the massive spirit diagram as it meticulously probed...

Connecting the different lengths and widths of these threads, that symbolized a network of spirit power, to his grandfather's words about basic spirit diagrams, he began to realize that the purpose of this spirit diagram was to 'gather spirit.'

According to his grandfather, basic spirit diagrams could be differentiated into four types: Spirit Gathering, Spirit Storage, Amplification, and Strengthening.

Spirit Gathering grants an "artifact" the ability to gather spirit energy. It enabled a martial practitioner to pour spirit energy into an artifact.

Spirit Storage allows an "artifact" the ability to store spirit energy. Repeatedly storing spirit energy for a number of times and unleashing it all at once would result in a terrifying power.

Amplification utilizes the materials an "artifact" was originally made out of to amplify the spirit energy that had been poured inside it.

For example, if a tenth of a person's spirit energy had been poured inside an "artifact," some certain special ingredients were able to double or even triple that amount.

Amplification could also be expressed in other ways, such as compressing spirit energy and refining it cycle after cycle until it becomes extremely pure and sharp as a needle. This was another way to apply Amplification.

The reason that a lot of blade type spirit artifacts could unleash a blade beam or sword beam was because there was an Amplification type spirit diagram configured to compress energy within them.

Strengthening enhances the toughness and durability of an “artifact.” It makes them harder to break, able to store more spirit energy, and able to utilize stronger levels of amplification.

Spirit Gathering, Spirit Storage, Amplification, and Strengthening were the four basic types of spirit diagrams that an artificer had to master. However, an artificer’s understanding of these four basic diagrams actually slightly differed from person to person.

A simple Amplification spirit diagram might have tens of inscription methods, and perhaps all of them could achieve the same amplification effect. However, the difference in effectiveness that each method could achieve was like heaven and earth.

Some Amplification spirit diagrams could only amplify the effective capacity by up to a hundredth. But other spirit diagrams could amplify an artifact’s effective capacity up to two times, several times, or even tens of times!

The same principle applied to the other three spirit diagrams. Depending on their inheritance, apprenticeship, and other differences, each artificer might have their own understanding and recognition of Spirit Gathering, Spirit Storage, and Strengthening spirit diagrams. So no two spirit diagrams would be the same, and their powers differed from one another as well.

Of course, the stronger the artificer, the stronger the spirit diagrams they could inscribe as their comprehension toward nature's spirit energy and natural law grows. The spirit diagrams will also become more and more flawless, increasingly matching the great way and natural law of the world, achieving amazing and hard to fathom effects.

"Spirit Gathering. This is Spirit Gathering! I need to see the other three spirit diagrams!"

Qin Lie focused his mind and discarded any thoughts of researching the diagram's mysteries for the moment. Relying purely on the artifact forging knowledge his grandfather had been forcing into his head for many years, he determined the effects of the remaining three spirit diagrams.

"Spirit Gathering! Amplification! Strengthening! So it is these three diagrams! But why are they so complicated even though they're the most basic of basics? This is practically chicken scratch; I feel faint just looking at it. It's hard to remember even one of them. I can't imagine who inscribed this in here..."

He quickly withdrew the wisp of mind energy soon after. Although he had confirmed the type of each of the four diagrams,

the doubt in his heart had only further deepened.

In next period of time, he would use the cave's electrical network to refine his body and practice Heavenly Thunder Eradication whenever there was a thunderstorm.

After he broke through to the seventh level of Refinement, the pace at which he cultivated Heavenly Thunder Eradication had increased rapidly, and he could now conduct lightning into his marrow and internal organs.

As he refined his innards with lightning again and again, he felt his body becoming stronger, starting to grow towards an even higher level. He had a vague sense that he was about to finish laying a solid foundation for Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

When he could cultivate Heavenly Thunder Eradication to the point where his marrow and internal organs could handle lightning strikes without a hitch, he would no longer have to rely on the cave's electrical network and could cultivate directly from external lightning sources.

During stormless days, he would gather his spirit energy and expand his spirit sea. At the same time, he continued to work through his fingers to achieve a state where he could discharge spirit energy from all major attack points on his body.

When he cultivated until his body was exhausted, he would then gather his mind energy and examine the four spirit diagrams inside the Soul Suppressing Orb.

Although a month passed, he had only managed to remember a third of the “Spirit Gathering” spirit diagram, and he didn’t even dare to inspect the other three.

The Spirit Gathering diagram alone consumed an enormous amount of mind energy, and every time he finished, his mind would become slow and sluggish.

However, he noticed that every time he recovered, his mind energy would improve, albeit by just a small amount. It seemed that examining the spirit diagram with his mind energy could also help cultivate it in return.

It was for this exact discovery that he forced himself and endured the incredibly dull task of diagram reading.

Mind energy was the power needed to break through the Soul Suppressing Orb’s seal, and whether he could uncover the mysteries of his past and rediscover his memories in the future or not fell entirely on the strength of his mind energy.

Therefore, no matter how torturous it was, as long as it was something that could enhance his mind energy, he would grit his teeth and take it all in stride.

Time passed quickly, and soon two months flew by.

Having persevered through a harsh period of training, his mind

energy had undergone an obvious improvement, and a solid foundation for Heavenly Thunder Eradication had been laid.

Now he could also discharge spirit energy from his fingers, palms, shoulders, and so forth. At times, when he had completely lost himself in training, he even vaguely felt that he was nearing the threshold to the eighth level of Refinement. This caused him to realize that his cultivation as of late had been progressing rapidly.

Moreover, he even managed to forcefully memorize that complicated and nigh incomprehensible Spirit Gathering diagram.

That being said, although he managed to memorize it, he did not understand the mystical workings of the diagram, nor did he know what it could be used for.

Today, when he returned to his stone house during the evening as usual, he saw Ling Yushi, who had been gone for a very long time, waiting for him with a smile.

“It’s been three months and you’re still exactly the same. Really, shouldn’t you at least look happy to see your fiancée?” Clad in green martial practitioner’s clothes, Ling Yushi looked both fresh and tidy. Her long black hair was like silk spilling across her shoulders. Her face was a healthy shade of red, and her beautiful eyes danced in high spirits. It was obvious that her cultivation level had improved.

“Thanks to you, I’ve finally broken through to the eighth level of Refinement!” Seeing no response from Qin Lie, she couldn’t help

but laugh before continuing, “I was only going to refine the Hundred Vein Pill, but I never thought that its effects would be this powerful! In conjunction with two Common Grade Six spirit stones, I actually broke through in just three months! This is incredible!”

Qin Lie was happy on the inside too. Because although her talent was slightly lacking compared to Ling Xuanxuan’s, he knew that she was in fact not too far behind. Moreover, she had been stuck at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm for quite some time now, and in Qin Lie’s opinion, it was only natural that she ascended a level after training hard for three months with the help of the Hundred Vein Pill and two Common Grade Six spirit stones.

“I’ve brought you something nice to eat, so come here already. I made them myself.” Ling Yushi smiled, waved him over, and then began setting down the dishes.

There were four dishes and a bowl of soup, and they all looked pretty tasty and enticing. Qin Lie didn’t bother with any pretenses as he picked up his chopsticks and started immediately. He found out that the food was really good.

“Nebula Pavilion found a fire crystal mine in Celestial Wolf Mountain. They have issued an order for the Ling Family, Feng Family, and Gao Family to send ten of their Refinement Realm martial practitioners to mine them, and in return, they are going to reward us with low level spirit stones. Since I just broke through to the eighth level of Refinement, dad asked me to lead a team together with Ling Feng and Ling Ying to mine the fire crystals with the Feng and Gao Family.”

While he was eating, Ling Yushi said faintly, “Daddy doesn’t want my little sister to join us because she is still at the seventh level of Refinement. He wants her to cultivate in the house properly, so I’m the only one left to lead the team. Sigh, I just came out of seclusion and I’m already being sent out on a mission. I won’t have time to take care of you... If I’m going out, then Ling Feng and Ling Ying will be as well, so you’ll be entering Herb Mountain alone. I’m not at ease leaving you alone. How, how about you coming along with me?”

She looked at Qin Lie with starry eyes.

“Celestial Wolf Mountain...” Qin Lie recalled his grandfather’s map and felt a small tremble in his heart.

“Since you’re not saying anything, I’m assuming that you’ve promised me okay? We’ll depart tomorrow morning, and I’ll come to pick you up. Don’t worry, there are men from Nebula Pavilion stationed there, and both the Feng and Gao families will also be sending ten members each. There won’t be any danger. Also, there are very few spirit beasts that appear around that area, so it’s going to be fine.”

With a wide smile, Ling Yushi stood up from her stone bench and watched Qin Lie with a sweet expression on her face as he buried himself in his food. As she pursed her lips and let out a giggle, she then turned around, immediately moving to fill the bath water for Qin Lie.

The moment she walked away, Qie Lie lifted his head. The vacant look in his eyes was gone, and his expression gradually turned serious.

“The reason why there aren’t spirit beasts around Celestial Wolf Mountain is because it is the domain of a Rank Two spirit beast, the Silver Winged Demon Wolf! According to the labels on grandfather’s map, Silver Winged Demon Wolves would set off on a pilgrimage to the peak, deep in the arctic mountains, every May and June, and they would return only around July. Now it’s almost the end of June…”

Qin Lie looked towards the washroom entrance and listened to Ling Yushi humming a small tune while cheerfully filling the bath for him. He began to feel a bit agitated.

Chapter 23: Holding Hands

Ling Yushi finished preparing the bath with hot water and left cheerfully. Before she left, she even reminded Qin Lie that she would come and pick him up early tomorrow.

Immersing himself in the wooden barrel filled with hot water, Qin Lie raised his head and looked at the house beam. As he was lost in thought, his brows creased.

The strength of the Rank Two spirit beast, Silver Winged Demon Wolf, could be compared to a martial practitioner in the Natal Opening Realm. When pit against a single Ice Soul Python, the Silver Winged Demon Wolf would have a greater chance of winning.

But most importantly, Silver Winged Demon Wolves were spirit beasts that lived in packs! Not only that, Celestial Wolf Mountain was precisely their den!

“Each year during May and June, Silver Winged Demon Wolves would make a pilgrimage to the peak to meet the ‘Icestone Snow Wolf King’, and they would return in July. Once they came back and saw that human martial practitioners had seized and occupied their territory…”

The bloody scene of Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, Ling Ying, and the others being torn into pieces by a Silver Winged Demon Wolf pack appeared in Qin Lie’s mind…

He didn’t know why, but he felt irritated and couldn’t calm himself down when he thought of Ling Yushi’s delicate body being torn into pieces.

“Looks like I need to go to the Herb Mountain first thing in the morning to retrieve the sculpture Grandpa carved. Celestial Wolf Mountain… just happened to be marked by grandfather.”

Once Qin Lie had made up his mind, his irritation soothed. As he sat in the wooden barrel, he focused mind energy and studied the “Spirit Storage” spirit diagram within the Soul Suppressing Orb.

Out of the four spirit diagrams: Spirit Gathering, Spirit Storage, Amplification, and Strengthening, he had already memorized the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram, and now he slowly started on another of the other three spirit diagrams.

……

The next morning, Ling Yushi, together with Ling Feng, Ling Ying, and the other Ling Family members, arrived at Qin Lie’s stone house very early in the morning.

Ling Yushi wore a blue, tight fitting outfit which highlighted her exquisite, curvy body. This caused the eyes of the many boys following her to flicker. They yearned to keep admiring her beauty, but were too embarrassed to do so.

“First Miss, do you really want to bring him?”

Ling Xin was of similar age to Ling Feng; he was tall, with thick eyebrows, big eyes, and a needle-thin mustache at the corner of his mouth. His cultivation was at the sixth level of the Refinement Realm, his earlier question was because he had some objections against Ling Yushi bringing Qin Lie along.

“Ling Xin, don’t be so long-winded!” Ling Feng frowned and scolded.

Ling Xin seemed to fear Ling Feng a little. After hearing Ling Feng’s scolding, his mouth twitched, but he didn’t say anything more.

Arriving in front of Qin Lie’s stone house, Ling Yushi yelled tenderly, “Qin Lie, we are setting off!”

After waiting a little while, seeing that there was no response in the house, Ling Yushi was slightly stunned. She pushed the door and walked in, then found that the house was empty, without any trace of Qin Lie.

In the house, Ling Yushi’s elegant face revealed obvious disappointment. She bit her lips lightly and sighed softly.

“...Maybe I was overthinking it , and he didn’t listen to what I said seriously at all, or maybe I just imagined his affection. Could he have heard it, but pretended not to instead?” Ling Yushi’s face was bitter, and she shook her head and laughed in a self-deprecating manner. After she walked out of the stone house, she

took a light breath and indifferently said, “Let’s go.”

Ling Xin was secretly happy seeing that Qin Lie wasn’t here as he thought to himself: One less burden would save a lot of trouble.

“First Miss, you don’t have to worry about it. The Patriarch will make other arrangements for people to look after him.” Ling Feng pondered and then comforted her.

“Yeah, the Du Family members have been less aggressive recently. They probably won’t act recklessly,” chimed Ling Ying.

Ling Yushi smiled, nodded her head, and said casually, “Let’s go, we will pass by Herb Mountain anyway. I will yell once at the caves later, and if he really doesn’t hear it, then we’ll forget about it.”

Hearing this, Ling Feng, Ling Ying, Ling Xin, and the others were all surprised, revealing puzzled expressions.

“Still not giving up? Could it be that she really sees that guy as her fiancée and actually has feelings for him? Incomprehensible…”

They inwardly shook their heads and threw doubtful looks at Ling Yushi.

Under everyone’s strange gazes, Ling Yushi was completely at ease, as she led the way towards Herb Mountain.

When the sun slowly rose, the party of ten arrived at the foot of Herb Mountain.

Looking at the mining caves in Herb Mountain, Ling Yushi took a deep breath and yelled with all her strength, “Qin Lie, we are about to leave, are you coming or not? We will wait for you for an hour, and if you don’t come out, we will leave first.”

“It’s still early, everyone should just take this as a break.” Turning over, Ling Yushi smiled lightly. She didn’t care if the others grew dissatisfied, and found herself a clean rock before sitting down.

Seeing such an attitude from her, they could only helplessly wait with her.

Time ticked by second by second, but there still was not a trace to be seen in the mines of Herb Mountain. Ling Yushi’s beautiful eyes showed disappointment, increasing as time passed by; she obviously wasn’t feeling well at heart.

“There’s no way that fool could hear…” After waiting for a while, Ling Xin couldn’t help but mumble as he became impatient.

Ling Feng glared at him viciously.

“First Miss, it is time. He probably won’t come.” Ling Ying got up energetically. Facing Ling Feng, she stretched her slim waist lazily. As she did so, her arrogant, soft bosom made an astonishing curve

as she tenderly said, “Big Brother Ling, we should start leaving, right?”

Ling Feng, seeing her display her body seductively, nodded with a small headache, and said, “First Miss, what do you think?”

“Let’s go.” Ling Yushi said in a quiet, sullen tone.

Celestial Wolf Mountain was also in the Arctic Mountain Range, and it was closest to the Gao Family. The Gao Family, Feng Family, and Ling Family were all vassal forces of Nebula Pavilion. Celestial Wolf Mountain’s Fire Crystal Quarry was on its cliff. It would be really difficult for an ordinary person to climb it; one careless mistake could cause the person to fall to his or her death.

Fire crystals were a fire source for artifact forging, and it was the most common kind. Once it was lit with fire, the fire crystal would burn fiercely, providing the heat required for forging spirit materials.

According to the difference in quality, the grade of the fire crystals would also be different. However, the ones with inferior quality were Common Grade Three spirit materials, and the ones with better quality would only be Common Grade Five spirit materials. It wasn’t too precious, so making high ranked martial practitioners from Nebula Pavilion mine them would seem overkill.

Because of this, Nebula Pavilion arranged their vassal forces, the Gao Family, Feng Family, and Ling Family, to mine them jointly.

In the end, they would tally the number and grade of the fire crystals that the three families mined and reward them accordingly with spirit stones.

Celestial Wolf Mountain and Solitary Ridge were in completely different directions, so as soon as they left Herb Mountain, they would be on a different path.

The ten people of the Ling Family slowly walked out of Herb Mountain. Ling Yushi looked back at Herb Mountain behind her, sighed faintly to herself, and disappointedly stepped on the path towards Celestial Wolf Mountain.

Knowing that she wasn't in a good mood, no one disturb her. Even chatter-box Ling Xin was satisfied enough to not say anything more after Qin Lie didn't turn up.

Walking under the many ancient trees, the rest of the group slowly started chatting and were excitedly discussing about mining at Celestial Wolf Mountain.

Later on, even Ling Feng and Ling Ying joined the conversations. They were all in high spirits and were imagining all the spirit stones that they could receive through the job.

Ling Yushi quietly pulled some distance away from the others and walked alone at the front. She walked silently with her head down, deep in thought, and occasionally would lift her head to watch the road.

Because she slowly felt that Qin Lie was not a fool, she figured he should have been able to hear what she had said, which was why she told him that she wanted to bring him along to Celestial Wolf Mountain.

But, after this happened, she wasn't so sure anymore.

As for other possibilities, she didn't want to think too much about them. She would rather believe that Qin Lie didn't hear what she had said than believe that he deliberately stood her up...

"You probably didn't hear it. Nevermind, I made assumptions." Ling Yushi comforted herself. However, she was still slightly bitter as she lifted her head again to look at the path before her.

Her pretty face suddenly froze. She subconsciously rubbed her eyes, and her dull eyes slowly brightened. Her bitter mouth bloomed into an extremely bright, beautiful smile.

Under a big tree ahead, a slender shadow stood stiff here, with clothes covered in dew drops; she didn't know how long he had been waiting.

Who else could it be other than Qin Lie?

Ling Yushi's heart was suddenly filled thick with sweetness as she laughed softly, unable to control herself. In her joyous laughter, her delicate body moved to Qin Lie's side like a gust of wind.

In front of others, it was the first time she had openly held Qin Lie's hand. She then turned her head and said to the stunned Ling Family members, "Turns out he had been waiting for us here all this time."

Ling Feng, Ling Ying, Ling Xin, and the other Ling family members were all stunned for a while. They looked at each other and suddenly felt like their minds couldn't follow this turn of events. "When did that guy... know to wait for people?"

"You guys go first!" Ling Yushi didn't care about their confusion and surprise, ordering them to walk in front.

As Ling Feng and the others passed by her and Qin Lie, they all wore odd expressions as they rubbed their heads, and Ling Ying's bright eyes seemed as though they had seen a ghost.

Everyone slowly passed the two of them.

"Oh you, seriously, you made me sad for a while!" Only when the others were far away, did Ling Yushi blush slightly and look at Qin Lie in a meaningful way. She then pounded his chest softly and smiled lightly in a gentle manner, saying, "It's good that you've come. Since you came... then that means you can hear what I say. Hah, how long can you keep pretending?"

Only now could she finally be sure that Qin Lie was definitely not the fool he acted like on the surface. He was at least sometimes clear-headed.

Qin Lie didn't immediately express anything and continued to stare blankly. After she finished talking, he wiggled his hand out from hers and advanced toward Ling Feng and the others.

"Heh, if you think this is interesting, then I will continue to play with you." Staring at his back, Ling Yushi laughed softly, shook her head, and immediately followed.

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Chapter 24: Celestial Wolf Mountain

Celestial Wolf Mountain comprised two mountain peaks.

From a distance, the two mountain peaks looked like two enormous wolves crouching and facing one another. Moreover, both wolves seemed to be howling towards the sky.

Between these two mountain peaks was a large, steep canyon. Embedded within the two cliffs of the canyon were fire crystals, and to mine them, one had to first scale those steep cliffs.

For an ordinary person to be able to go up and mine upon those cliffs was clearly rather unrealistic. Only martial practitioners who had spent long years bitterly training were able to take on the great responsibility of mining due to their physiques which were of much higher quality than the masses.

Qin Lie and Ling Yushi traveled with the group and arrived at Celestial Wolf Mountain right before dusk.

They immediately noticed the many hanging rattan ropes on both sides of the canyon's steep cliffs. Relying on the support from these ropes, martial practitioners of the Gao and Feng families, maneuvered along the cliffs like monkeys, using their chisels and pickaxes to hammer at the crystals.

The setting sun's light shined down, causing a faint, fiery crimson glow to flicker sporadically along the canyon's cliffs.

Wherever the fiery red light flickered, a small chunk of fire crystal could be found. This crystal was crimson as if it were a kind of turbid crystallized body, and when illuminated by the sun, it would glow.

Qin Lie observed the fiery light which flickered across the canyon's cliffs and muttered a sentence within the depths of his heart, "So this is a fire crystal, huh..."

From listening to his grandfather's thorough explanation of forging artifacts, he knew that every time an artificer smelted spirit materials they required the assistance of a fire source.

This was extremely easy to understand. As even the most ordinary blacksmiths required fire when they smelted iron, fire would naturally be required when forging artifacts. It wasn't possible to skip this most basic procedure.

Of course, the fire source artificers used would naturally be different from that of a blacksmith's which was from burning wood.

The fire source for artificers was usually obtained through one of three methods. First, the artificers themselves could cultivate a fire technique which would allow their spirit energy to transform into the fire source for forging artifacts. This method was heavily dependent on the artificer's cultivation level and was also the most taxing on the Artificer's spirit and mind energy.

When his grandfather repaired spirit artifacts, he had used this type of fire source to smelt and forge. Artificers who cultivated fire techniques, could always forge artifacts no matter where they were. Thus, this was the most convenient method for artificers. However, it consumed the most spirit energy and was also heavily dependent on the artificer's cultivation level.

The second method to obtain a fire source was to harness the fire of the earth's core and use the raging fire of a volcano to forge artifacts. In general, many Master Artificers would only use this method if they needed to refine an enormous artifact. There were also specialized Artificer Sects which would select volcanoes as their forging ground, guiding the violent fire of the volcano into multiple forging chambers which the disciples would then use to forge artifacts.

This type of method which relied on the earth's energy as a fire source could not be used at will to forge artifacts and could only be done at a designated area. However, where there were cons, there were pros as well. This method consumed very little spirit energy and did not depend on cultivation level.

The third and final method was to use fire type spirit materials like fire crystals. Upon igniting these spirit materials, they would become a fire source for Artifact Forging.

This kind of fire source did not consume the Artificer's spirit energy and did not depend on cultivation level either. It was also portable, and thus, it was the most commonly used method by Artificers.

However, this kind of fire source was consumable, which meant that each usage of a crystal represented the loss of it.

Each of the three fire sources were able to complete the task of refining spirit materials, and each type had its own pros and cons. Sometimes, Artificers would even combine multiple sources, allowing them to use the advantages of each source.

After breaking through to the seventh level of Refinement, Qin Lie was now also able to discharge spirit energy. This meant that he was finally able to truly use spirit artifacts to their full potential.

Recently, Qin Lie had constantly been memorizing the spirit diagrams within his Soul Suppressing Orb; this caused him to more or less develop some ideas about forging artifacts...

Even though fire crystals were only the most basic fire source for forging artifacts, for him, it was not something that was easily obtainable.

There were two reasons why he accompanied Ling Yushi to Celestial Wolf Mountain. Firstly, he was afraid that Ling Yushi would run into trouble. Secondly, he wanted to obtain a few fire crystals for him to try his hand at making a spirit artifact.

“The Ling Family has come to report,” Ling Yushi tenderly shouted.

Below the canyon, a man wearing a Nebula robe sat on a recliner.

He was lazily watching the setting sun in the sky. At this time, his eyes unconsciously latched onto the members of the Ling Family. He raised his hand, beckoning them over, and said, “I am Liu Yan, the person who was tasked with this matter by those above me. Mn, it’s already late today. Starting from tomorrow morning, you will all go and mine together with the Feng and Gao families. All of the fire crystals that you guys mine will be handed over to me, and I will count them. After the task is completed, Nebula Pavilion will give you the corresponding number of spirit stones as payment.”

Liu Yan seemed around thirty years old and had a slightly pudgy body. He wore a long beard, and his eyes were seemingly always half amused. He had a kind of casual attitude about him.

“Big brother Liu, these are today’s gains from the Feng Family.” A handsome, lax youth with a robust body jumped down from above, tossing a cloth bag onto the table in front of Liu Yan. He then turned towards the Ling Family, showing a magnificent smile, and said, “Ling Feng, how long has it been since we last met, hm?”

The youth was extremely handsome and wore white battlewear. A strip of gold was etched into the corners of his clothes, causing the clothes to seem extremely precious and extraordinary.

Although he directed his question to Ling Feng, his eyes were instead fixated on Ling Yushi. Walking over with large steps and a smile as bright as the sun, he said, “Ling Yushi! Haha, so this time the Ling Family had you bring people over. It’s been quite a while

since we have met, right?”

“Yes, it has been two years,” Ling Yushi responded indifferently.

“Who is he?” asked Ling Ying to the people around her.

“Feng Yi, the second young master of the Feng Family. Two years ago, he had already reached the seventh level of Refinement. By now, he has definitely reached the eighth. His brother, Feng Kai, is already a core disciple of Nebula Pavilion. If there are no accidents, this guy will also break through into the Natal Opening Realm before he is twenty and follow his brother in Nebula Pavilion.”

The crude and rough looking Ling Xin looked towards Feng Yi with faint admiration. Lowering his voice, he whispered an explanation to Ling Ying, “Two years ago, when First Miss, Ling Feng, and I were within the Arctic Mountain Range, we formed a team with them to hunt spirit beasts. There is more or less some friendship between them. Moreover, Feng Yi developed some feelings for First Miss during that time…”

“Nine Common Grade Four fire crystals, not bad. Continue to work hard tomorrow.” Liu Yan recorded the number, his eyes squinting as he smiled and nodded at Feng Yi.

At this time, the other nine practitioners of the Feng Family also descended from the canyon’s cliffs.

They stood by Feng Yi, smiled, and exchanged tips for mining fire

crystals while also observing the people from the Ling Family. Their gazes were mostly focused towards Ling Yushi and Ling Ying, and they occasionally chuckled and whispered to each other.

The ten practitioners from the Feng Family were all at the Refinement Realm. Most of them were at the fifth, sixth, and seventh levels, but most importantly… they were all male.

As they had arrived somewhat earlier, they had already spent a few days mining in boredom. Now, upon seeing two fresh beauties, Ling Yushi and Ling Ying, their eyes immediately lightened up, becoming excited.

“Brother Liu, this is the Gao Family’s.”

Another youth flew down. This youth wore a black practitioner uniform with hair almost touching his two shoulders. His gaze was insidious, and the depths of his eyes revealed evilness.

“That’s Gao Yu, the youngest young master of the Gao Family. Both of his sisters have entered Nebula Pavilion. The Gao Family’s Patriarch greatly spoils him, and as for his character… he’s kind of eccentric. He should only be sixteen, a year younger than Feng Yi. Not too long ago, I heard that he had broken through into the eighth level of Refinement.”

This time, before Ling Ying could even make a sound, Ling Xin lowered his voice and explained this youth’s background.

After thinking for a moment, Ling Xin's face became sullen, and he continued, "This Gao Yu... you should be cautious around him. Rumor has it that this guy is kind of crazy and that he has apparently slain some young girls in the past. Yes, you should avoid provoking him, or else there might be endless trouble."

Listening to Ling Xin's words sent chills down Ling Ying's spine as she always liked showing off in front of Ling Feng.

Looking at Gao Yu's pale white face and his pair of dark, cold eyes, which contained evilness, Ling Ying couldn't help but take a step back, moving closer to Ling Feng. Clearly, she was somewhat afraid.

"Five Common Grade Four, six Common Grade Three, and a Common Grade Five, not a bad harvest." Liu Yan sat upright, and after a moment, he turned towards Gao Yu and smiled.

Qin Lie looked carefully at them and realized that when Liu Yan talked to Gao Yu, he was no longer laying in his chair and had instead sat upright. It was as if he placed more importance on this person.

Gao Yu's slightly cold eyes swept across the Ling Family's group before he left with the rest of those from the Gao Family. They walked to the other side of the canyon and started preparing fire for their food.

"Ling Feng, Yushi, come and join us for dinner," warmly invited Feng Yi.

“No need. We brought our own food. Moreover, we killed quite a few small beasts on the way over. There’s no need for the trouble,” politely declined Ling Yushi.

“Yushi, you are too courteous. It has already been two years since we last met. Let’s all just drink some liquor and happily converse for a while. Are you not even willing to give me this amount of face?” Feng Yi asked with a bitter smile.

“Then… alright, I guess.” Without a choice, Ling Yushi brought the Ling Family over to the Feng Family’s quarters.

The Feng Family’s practitioners quickly got a fire going and took out the jugs of liquor. They also took out some cooked meat, smiling as they invited the Ling Family members to sit.

Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and the others were all familiar with some of the Feng Family, and thus, sat as requested without being too courteous. They took out the wild rabbits, pheasants, and other sorts of small animals that they had killed on their way and threw them over the fire. They laughed and conversed with the Feng Family’s practitioners while expertly maintaining the barbecue.

“Qin Lie, sit next to me.” Ling Yushi tugged at Qin Lie discretely and tried to pull him to her side. Shortly after, she received the barbecued meat which Feng Yi passed over and pressed it into Qin Lie’s hands, softly saying, “We have traveled so far today in order to rush over; you must be hungry. Eat this first and fill up your stomach a little. I will go and roast a few pheasants for you to eat.”

Feng Yi, in order to impress the beauty, didn't eat a single piece of the meat he cooked and instead gallantly gave it all to Ling Yushi.

Never would he have thought that the beauty would be even more straightforward and give it to Qin Lie beside her. This caused Feng Yi to clearly be slightly stunned, his face becoming kind of awkward.

"Who is this younger brother?" asked Feng Yi with a smile.

Qin Lie's expression was like a block of wood, one which didn't know manners. He just held the cooked meat and ate as if he didn't know any decency.

"He's my fiance,." replied Ling Yushi reflexively.

The smile upon Feng Yi's face immediately froze, his eyes becoming gloomy. Coughing a laugh, he asked, "When did you become engaged? How come your father didn't notify my Feng Family? I really didn't receive any news about it."

The faces of other practitioners of the Feng Family also became slightly blank, unconsciously beginning to closely scrutinize Qin Lie.

Upon examining him, they noticed Qin Lie's wooden expression and began to feel that something wasn't quite right. Thus, they

became increasingly curious.

"It's only an engagement and not something important. Thus, my father decided that it wasn't necessary to announce it to everyone. That's why we didn't notify any of our nearby friends." Ling Yushi faintly smiled. Hearing Qin Lie's chewing sounds, she knew that he was definitely doing it on purpose. She helplessly glared accusingly at him. Within her heart, she didn't know whether to laugh or cry, thinking: This guy, you have to be laughing inside; you are definitely embarrassing me on purpose.

"Ling Xin, who is this guy? It seems as if I haven't seen him before, is he a bit...?" tentatively inquired one of the Feng Family practitioners.

Ling Xin grunted and disdainfully said, "He isn't a part of my Ling Family. This guy has some problem with his brain and is a complete idiot. Only the devil knows why the Patriarch agreed to let him and First Miss be engaged."

"I knew it, look at his clumsiness. To think he's actually an idiot." The guy began to laugh strangely.

"Whoosh!"

The fiery stick in her hand, along with the greasy pheasant on it, drew a line of fire as it flew across and hit the guy straight in the chest.

The person hit couldn't help but groan. Afterwards, he suddenly stood up, quickly trying to disperse all of the sparks upon his chest in case they began to blaze. Turning around, he glared angrily at Ling Yushi.

"Be careful when you speak!" exclaimed Ling Yushi, her clear eyes narrowing. She suddenly stood up and turned to Feng Yi, saying, "Thanks for the hospitality!" Then, she grabbed Qin Lie, turned around, and left.

Feng Yi and everyone else's expressions all became awkward. Feng Yi hurriedly scolded his clan member while Ling Feng and Ling Ying, seeing what it had become like, couldn't help but rise and say their own goodbyes before leaving to follow Ling Yushi.

Ling Yushi brought Qin Lie to the other end of the canyon, her beautiful face harsh and cheerless. She waited there until Ling Feng and the rest of the group came, coldly glared at Ling Xin, and said, "In front of your own family members, there are some words that I don't care about, but if you dare say that again in front of outsiders, don't blame me for being uncourteous!"

She, who always seemed to be gentle and elegant, had suddenly become so strict and unreasonable. This caused Ling Xin to feel a little guilty in the depths of his heart, his face flushed red and he didn't dare to say anything more than "yes."

Qin Lie's expression was still wooden, but his heart warmed.

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Chapter 25: High Grade Spirit Materials

The next few days, the Ling Family mined fire crystals together with martial practitioners from the Gao and Feng Families, then hand their yields for the day to Liu Yan in the evening so that they could be counted and recorded. Afterwards, they would go their separate ways, hunting for small animals, setting up their tents, starting fires for their meals, and cultivating for a while before sleeping.

Gao Yu and the Gao Family's martial practitioners never had any excessive interactions with either the Ling or Feng Families. Every day, after they finished their task, they would rest at their designated quarters.

Liu Yan, who was in charge of overseeing this task, would always go over to the Gao Family to eat dinner after he had finished counting and recording all the mined fire crystals. From this, it could be seen that he was relatively closer to Gao Yu.

As the practitioners of the Ling and Feng Families were rather familiar with each other, they had often moved amongst each other during the last few days.

In regard to this, it wasn't good for Ling Yushi to stop them and she could only ignore it.

After the event which had happened two days ago, Ling Yushi never grouped up with the Feng Family again. Instead, she was constantly starting fires and cooking with Qin Lie and the few

practitioners who weren't familiar with those of the Feng Family.

However, Feng Yi seemingly didn't take the small conflict a few days earlier to heart and tried to find opportunities to converse with Ling Yushi daily, whether it was talking about how to split the mining areas or exchanging tips for mining.

Whenever Feng Yi saw Qin Lie, he would greet him in a friendly manner. Ling Yushi, upon seeing his amiable character, felt bad keeping a straight face all the time and began to occasionally smile and say a few sentences.

Qin Lie didn't really participate in the Ling Family's mining. During the day he tended to wander around the nearby mountain forests by himself before choosing a quiet place to cultivate in.

Only when it was about to be meal time did he reappear within the canyon so that he could eat with the Ling Family members.

Towards the matter of the Ling Family having brought a fool over to mine, Liu Yan had no opinions to express. He clearly didn't think anything of Qin Lie, and every time he saw Qin Lie, he would disregard or ignore him.

Most of the time, Liu Yan was narrow-eyed and resting. Only when a small dispute or problem arose while the Ling, Feng, and Gao Families were mining would he finally come forward and mediate.

Members of the three families were scattered across both sides of the canyon, and occasionally, disputes would occur over mining sites. As the Ling and Feng Families were familiar with each other, their martial practitioners rarely had disputes with each other. Only when the Gao Family was involved would there ever be any friction, and every time, Liu Yan would correctly manage the situation so that the three sides could proceed to mine smoothly.

Today, Qin Lie once again returned to the entrance of the canyon around meal time.

He discovered the martial practitioners of the Ling, Feng, and Gao Families had still yet to finish today's mining. In fact, many of the Gao Family's practitioners were all grouped up together around one rock cliff.

Upon the rock cliff, an extremely deep hole had been bore open. By the hole, hanging onto ropes, were several extremely excited Gao Family practitioners who were whispering amongst themselves.

The Ling and Feng Families' practitioners, upon seeing the irregular actions of the Gao Family practitioners, began to grow curious and slowly made their way up.

Suddenly, the Gao Family's Gao Yu, the noticeably pale skinned youth, trembled slightly. Waving his hand towards Liu Yan, who was climbing up, he said, "Brother Liu! Over here! Come look over here!"

As the sun's rays shined down, a marvelously beautiful orange luster emitted from within the hole Gao Yu was hanging by.

"Fiery Solar Jade! It's Fiery Solar Jade! It's a Profound Grade Three spirit material!"

Liu Yan had yet to reach the hole, but just from his own experience, he was able to tell what it was. Unable to restrain himself, he let out a great shout of surprise as an excited expression spread across his slightly chubby face.

Fiery Solar Jade was a Profound Grade spirit material and was used for refining fire attribute Profound Grade spirit artifacts. It was capable of providing a spirit artifact with sufficient energy.

Furthermore, martial practitioners who cultivated flame techniques could directly draw out the fire energy within to enhance their cultivation; for them, it was even more effective than spirit stones.

The value of a Profound Grade Three Fiery Solar Jade was much more extraordinary than Common Grade Four or Five fire crystals! Fire crystals were only the most basic fire source while Fiery Solar Jade was spirit material that could be used by practitioners who had cultivated to the Manifestation Realm and Netherpassage Realm!

It was no exaggeration to say that a single piece of Fiery Solar Jade was even more precious than ten pieces of Common Grade Five fire crystals!

“In areas where Fiery Solar Jade is present, the temperature will be extremely high. No wonder there are fire crystals nearby. Evidently, this rock cliff could give birth to many more fire crystals, and it would all be due to this Fiery Solar Jade!” The corners of Liu Yan’s mouth drew back into a huge smile as he excitedly laughed and said, “This time our Nebula Pavilion is fortunate. I wonder how much Fiery Solar Jade exists on both sides. Fiery Solar Jade... it is something that we can exchange with Dark Asura Hall for many benefits!”

At this time, Gao Yu, who always seemed dark and cold, also began to laugh with a similarly carefree attitude.

The members of the Feng and Ling Families, upon hearing about the existence of Fiery Solar Jade, were also overjoyed. They knew that those who had come mining this time would definitely be rewarded for their great contributions.

“Gao Yu, Fiery Solar Jade differs from fire crystals. This matter must immediately be reported to the elders so that they can arrange for even stronger experts to come!” Liu Yan took a deep breath, then instructed, “Your Gao Family is the closest. Quickly arrange for someone to return and notify your father. Tell your father to notify Nebula Pavilion and let them rearrange everything.”

“Yes!” Without wasting a breath, Gao Yu immediately shouted, “Gao Yuan! Quickly go home. Within two days, you must convey the message to the family!”

Without even replying, one of the Gao Family martial practitioners jumped off the cliff, landing on the ground below. He then turned towards the Gao Family's headquarters and hurriedly ran off.

"It is already late. Everyone, go and hunt some wild game, have a nice night and happily drink yourselves full; have a good celebration!" exclaimed the smiling Liu Yan. Encouraging everyone to party, he continued, "From tomorrow onwards, we shall temporarily put off mining fire crystals and focus all of our efforts towards this piece of Fiery Solar Jade! Rest assured, this time, all three families have greatly contributed, and no family will be left unrewarded!"

A rumbling response was given by everyone.

The martial practitioners of the Gao, Ling, and Feng Families immediately dispersed to their own quarters, all of them excited. They formed many small groups of three to five and then went into the nearby mountain forests to hunt for wild game, ready to celebrate and have a good night of drinking.

"Our luck is truly good. The value of Fiery Solar Jade is equivalent to a city. To Nebula Pavilion, it is already a rarity. To have participated in the mining this time, we truly came at the right time. After it's over, the number of spirit stones we receive will definitely surpass our expectations! Perhaps I can rely on the harvests to breakthrough the seventh level of Refinement!" exclaimed Ling Xin with a smile on his face and his fists clenched in excitement.

People like Ling Feng and Ling Ying were also full of smiles. Ling Yushi was no different. Her shining eyes gleamed a brilliant splendor as she was similarly caught up in her own wonderful fantasies.

The next morning, at the break of dawn, the three families excitedly left to mine the Fiery Solar Jade. Qin Lie just followed his usual routine, leaving the canyon after eating his fill.

He cultivated by himself within a forest secluded in the mountain. It seemed as if his luck today was quite good, as in the afternoon, the sky slowly became dark. Before long, the rumbling of thunder could be heard.

Under a giant tree, Qin Lie sat cross legged, concentrating on circulating Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

“Bzzt bzzt bzzt!”

Between his fingertips, strokes of fine electric arcs fluctuated like nimble electric snakes.

As he sunk deeper into the art’s formula, and as spirit energy gradually seeped toward all the bones in his body, he could faintly hear the muffled sound of thunder emanating from the cavity of his chest, as though resonating with booming sounds of the thunder in the firmament.

“Boom boom boom!”

In the raging sky, a deafening thunderclap, followed by bolt after bolt of lightning began to gradually interweave themselves together.

That lightning hovered over the top of the mountain forest, and after a while, as if was gradually being attracted by Qin Lie, began to congregate in the area around him.

“Boom!”

Thunder constantly resounded around him as bolts of lightning struck down from the skies, landing directly onto his body.

“Ohhhh!”

The lightning rushing into his body caused Qin Lie to helplessly scream in pain. His hair had all but become charred as his body unceasingly quivered.

The violent current instantly surged into his inner body, charging through his flesh like a strongly galloping horse!

He felt a burning sting throughout all his muscles and veins as the electric current followed the circulation of Heavenly Thunder Eradication, surging all the way to his chest cavity and causing his sensation of pain to increase several fold. It was so unbearable that he almost went to roll on the ground.

“Too frightening! If it’s like this, I might not be able to endure it. I have to do it slowly!”

Qin Lie quickly realized that in order to lay a solid foundation for his body, he needed to bear the direct bombardments of thunder. Currently, he was still unable to stand, causing him to feel fearful that he could die at any time.

The strange formations within the depths of Herb Mountain had the effect of an insulator, weakening the thunder and lightning by splitting the lightning along the wire web. This made it relatively easier for him to bear.

As of right now, it was still too hard for him to not use the strange formations and bear the thunder and lightning directly. He had to gradually adjust his body and attract less thunder and lightning for now.

He choppily circulated Heavenly Thunder Eradiation, and the amount of thunder and lightning condensing in the sky clearly reduced. The thunder and lightning that struck down was also quite a bit weaker, making it much easier for him to cultivate with.

“Won’t circulating Heavenly Thunder Eradication when my level of cultivation is higher and my spirit energy is both thicker and purer... attract even fiercer thunder and lightning? If it’s like that, then in the future, after I’ve advanced further, I can still continue cultivating through this method, calling down even more powerful thunder to temper and continuously strengthen my flesh!”

“Based on what Grandpa once said, I should persistently cultivate Heavenly Thunder Eradication and not be negligent. If I can use the power of the lightning of the Ninth Heaven to temper my flesh, muscles, veins, bones, and organs and toughen my body to a certain extent, I will gain the ‘Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body!’ Once I attain the ‘Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body,’ my body will undergo a qualitative change which will allow me to, with but a thought, incite the thunder within me to rumble. Furthermore, I’ll be able to directly summon thunder and lightning from the most distant part of the Ninth Heaven even when I’m below the blazing sun, and rage wildly across the world!”

Recalling what his grandfather, Qin Shan, had said when describing the ‘Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body,’ his heart began to yearn. He began to assiduously receive and attract thunder and lightning at an increasing rate to temper his body, causing the area around him to become filled with the flickering of lightning and sound of thunder. The booming thunder constantly exploded around him.

He didn’t know how long had passed, but eventually, the thunder and lightning stopped and a torrential rainfall began.

He sat cultivating in the rain for an extremely long time, but suddenly, he heard the cheerful sounds of some small beasts around him; he also smelled the strong scent of blood.

Qin Lie’s heart became uncertain, and after thinking about it for a moment, he stopped cultivating. He moved towards the cries of the small animals with furrowed brows.

Condensed below a large, densely leaved tree were several aardwolves. They were clawing something within the mud, constantly biting into it until it was a bloody mess.

Aardwolves didn't understand how to circulate the nature spirit energy, so they weren't considered spirit beasts. Towards Qin Lie, they held no danger whatsoever. Furthermore, as there was still lightning fluctuating along his body, those aardwolves quickly fled as soon as he approached.

"This, this is... Gao Yuan!" Looking forward, the color quickly drained from Qin Lie's face, and he became unable to restrain himself from yelling in shock.

The corpse's body had already become indistinct, but from the clothes that it wore and its unsightly appearance, Qin Lie was immediately able to discern the identity of the deceased person.

It was Gao Yuan, a martial practitioner of the Gao Family!

It was the martial practitioner who had been ordered to return and report to the Gao Family last night. His cultivation was at the sixth level of the Refinement Realm, and there was no way that he had been killed by aardwolves!

Looking closer, he discovered that the nearby soil was loose. Moreover, a small pit had been revealed due to the torrential rain. Nearby, there were also marks from the exploding thunder...

He immediately understood. This Gao Yuan had been killed by someone last night and then expertly buried.

Perhaps while Qin Lie was cultivating and attracting the bombardment of thunder, it had coincidentally also hit this area. Afterwards, the torrential rain eroded the area, causing the scent of blood to waft out from the corpse. Subsequently, the aardwolves smelled it and came over to feast.

“He was killed last night, but why would anyone kill him? He was going to report to the Gao Family... who could have done it? Could it be that there are other forces lurking nearby?” Qin Lie frowned, his heart becoming flooded with worry.

He realized that the Ling Family’s mission this time around might be harder than he had expected. Not only did they have to deal with the Silver Winged Demon Wolves that were probably on their way here, they might also have to face an additional unknown force.

Chapter 26: Undercurrents

Qin Lie reburied Gao Yuan's corpse and removed all of the nearby traces. After thinking for a while and upon seeing the sky darken, he began walking towards the canyon.

The rain gradually stopped.

When he returned to the canyon, he saw the martial practitioners of the Ling, Feng, and Gao Families still mining along the cliffs. They all looked like chickens which had been dropped into broth, their bodies completely drenched. However, their minds were still exuberant as if the Fiery Solar Jade had invigorated them to the point of not knowing exhaustion.

Even Liu Yan no longer laid within the valley resting like usual. Instead, he had moved to the area where the Fiery Solar Jade had been discovered. His expression was absolutely radiant as he overlooked the people from the Gao, Ling, and Feng Family as they were busily working, making sure that they didn't hide a piece of Fiery Solar Jade for themselves.

Towards the fire crystals he had always been somewhat inattentive, but that was because fire crystals weren't worth too much. Since none of the three families had artificers, they wouldn't steal the fire crystals.

Fiery Solar Jade was vastly different.

The value of Profound Grade spirit materials was just too high. If

anyone from the three families stole a Fiery Solar Jade, they could immediately go to any of Icestone City's auction houses and exchange it for quite a large amount of wealth.

Thus, Liu Yan had to keep his eyes peeled in case someone tried to covertly steal some Fiery Solar Jade.

"Little Ying'er, come and drink a few cups with elder brother in a bit?" invited Feng Lun as he grinned with an undisguised, lusty glint flashing through his eyes as they unceasingly stuck to Ling Ying who was close by. "Big brother is much stronger than Ling Feng, and more capable at taking care of you too, hehe."

After being drenched by the rain, Ling Ying's fine figure was completely revealed, her full, curvy body arousing the wild and fanciful thoughts of others.

Grabbing the rope with one hand, her feet moved across the cliff, causing her perky butt to slightly rise. All of the nearby martial practitioners of the Gao and Feng Families couldn't help but discretely gulp as they wantonly stared at her.

However, the only one who dared speak their mind was Feng Lun. All the Gao Family martial practitioners didn't say a word.

Feng Lun was Feng Yi's cousin and had cultivated to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Previously, the person who was rude towards Qin Lie and provoked Ling Yushi's rebuke was precisely him.

After being taught a lesson on the spot by Ling Yushi and then reprimanded by Feng Yi, Feng Lun had stayed quiet for a long period of time. Even recently he hadn't done anything outstanding. Thus, it was unknown why he would suddenly act presumptuously today.

"Go look after your mother!" Ling Ying was a little prickly rose with her beautiful eyes glaring at Feng Lun as she opened her mouth to unceremoniously insult him.

"Feng Lun! Clean your mouth a little!" coldly shouted the nearby frowning Ling Feng, unable to restrain himself.

"Hehe, your little mouth is very fierce, very interesting! I like it!" A sliver of hostility flashed through Feng Lun's eyes as he lowered his head and creepily laughed. "I hope you can continue being so fierce, it won't be any fun otherwise..."

"Shut up!" coldly shouted Feng Yi.

Feng Lun was clearly somewhat afraid of him, as his head shrunk back and he stopped speaking.

At this time, the other Feng Family practitioners beside him all looked interested for some reason as if they were all expecting something out of the ordinary.

"Enough, stop quarreling. Let us it end here today," chipped in Liu Yan narrowing his eyes. "Not bad, today, your three families

have mined a total of eleven pieces of Fiery Solar Jade. Compared to our previous day's efforts, the value of today's efforts... is much greater than all of the previous days combined! Everyone rest assured, the pavilion will definitely not treat you wrongly!"

Following Liu Yan's instructions, the practitioners from the three families began to gradually climb down from the cliffs. After reaching the canyon, many of them began to return to their tents to change into dry clothes.

Ling Yushi wore neat blue battlewear, which had also been drenched by the rain, revealing her alluring and supple body. Feng Yi, who wasn't too far away, couldn't help but constantly look over.

Upon seeing Qin Lie's return, Ling Yushi sweetly smiled. She brushed aside the wet hair from her forehead before saying, "Let me go change clothes with Ling Ying first. In a short while, I will make you something to eat."

Ling Yushi and Ling Ying shared the same tent. Knowing that the two of them were squeezed into one tent and changing their clothes distracted the minds of many of the nearby practitioners. Sneaky eyes swept over as they all wished for their eyes to penetrate into the tent and experience the wonderful scenery within.

Before long, Ling Yushi and Ling Ying changed into dry clothes and walked out. Ling Feng and the others had also changed their clothes one after another, and before long, everyone grouped together.

“God dammit, that bastard from the Feng Family. I don’t know why he suddenly began mouthing off. A few days earlier, everything was still fine, but now, he dares to act so wantonly with Little Ying!” Ling Xin scowled, then looked towards the Feng Family practitioners in the distance. “Last night, they had someone complain that their body wasn’t comfortable, and that they needed to return home to get treated. From my point of view, that guy didn’t look sick at all. He must have rushed home to report discovering the Fiery Solar Jade.”

Qin Lie’s heart shivered, and he unconsciously looked over towards the Feng Family’s quarters.

“Hehe, look at that fool!” In the Feng Family’s quarters, Feng Lun discovered Qin Lie’s gaze sweeping over them. He grinned and began to laugh strangely, “Him? He’s engaged to the girl young master had his eye on… the Ling Family’s Patriarch has probably been infected by that fool to the point of stupidity.”

“Yeah, it’s rumored that a woman surnamed Du has pressured the Ling Family to the point where they can’t even raise their heads. The Ling Family’s Ling Chenghui… was driven to death by her, and they still didn’t dare to say anything,” whispered someone nearby, continuing the conversation. Sneering, they continued to ridicule the Ling Family’s various disgraces, constantly emitting one disgusting laugh after another.

The two families were separated by quite the distance, but occasionally, some of the chatter from the Feng Family’s quarters would float over, causing the faces of the Ling Family’s people to

become increasingly ugly.

"Those bastards of the Feng Family, did they take the wrong medicine these last two days?" Ling Xin immediately stood up, angrily yelling, "First Miss, do you want me to go over and shut them up?"

"Forget about it, they are just whispering behind our backs, there's no need to care." Ling Yushi weakly waved her hand, motioning for him to sit back down. Afterwards, with a similar feeling of uncertainty, she said, "Starting from yesterday, those people from the Feng Family have truly begun acting a little strange. That Feng Yi, the way he was looking at me today... was becoming more and more untoward."

"Does the Feng Family have some kind of problem?" asked Ling Feng profoundly.

"What kind of problems could they have?" Ling Yushi shook her head and continued, "With Nebula Pavilion's Liu Yan present, what kind of problem could they have? The Feng Family is the same as us, but a vassal of Nebula Pavilion. If Nebula Pavilion wanted to eliminate the Feng Family, it would be but a simple task. Furthermore, Feng Kai is within Nebula Pavilion, what problems could the Feng Family throw out?"

"That's true." Hearing Ling Yushi's reasoning, Ling Feng nodded his head and said no more.

As Qin Lie silently listened, waves began to roil within his heart.

He had secretly gained a clue...

Blankly looking at the Feng Family opposite him, Qin Lie became inwardly cautious. It was very possible that Gao Yuan's death was related to the Feng Family member who had left.

According to common sense, the Feng Family, as a vassal force, would definitely not dare to play dirty tricks right below Liu Yan's eyes as he was from Nebula Pavilion.

But this time, it was different.

Fiery Solar Jade was just much too valuable. Furthermore, this entire area was a Fiery Solar Jade mine, making its value immeasurable! It was definitely worth it for some people to take the risk!

Thinking upon this further, Qin Lie suddenly discovered his train of thought was becoming nimbler, as if he had experienced this matter over ten years ago, expertly analyzing and deducing everything.

"If I were the Feng Family and had already made the decision to not care about offending Nebula Pavilion with regards to stealing away these immeasurably valuable Fiery Solar Jade spirit materials, what would I do?"

Qin Lie asked himself, searching for an answer in his heart. Afterwards, his psyche shivered, feeling increasingly uneasy.

His conclusion was —— to kill everyone within the canyon who knew about it! The Ling Family, the Gao Family, and Liu Yan, not a single one would be left alive!

Only if everyone was eliminated could they guarantee that no information about the Fiery Solar Jade would leak out. That would then allow them to take full control of the mine and mine all of the Fiery Solar Jade before Nebula Pavilion discovered anything. Afterwards, they could make additional arrangements.

After arriving at this conclusion, when Qin Lie looked over at the Feng Family martial practitioners once more, he discovered that their eyes were all leaking hostility...

If it was truly like this, then in their eyes, the Ling Family had probably become lambs to the slaughter. No wonder their attitudes had become so abnormal, as they were no longer bitterly repressing their hidden desires towards Ling Ying and Ling Yushi, and instead gradually spiralling out of control.

A silent night passed.

The next morning, Qin Lie didn't go out to cultivate like usual and instead remained within the canyon, woodenly watching the people of the three families atop the cliffs as they mined Fiery Solar Jade together.

He carefully examined the expressions and every minute action of the Feng Family's practitioners and discovered that as they

mined, they seemed to not be as excited and focused as the others from the Gao and Ling Families.

Every so often, the Feng Family's martial practitioners took advantage of the moments when everyone else was focused on mining to stare at their backs, and within their eyes was indeed killing intent.

It gradually became clear to Qin Lie that the reason why the Feng Family members had yet to make a move was because the strength of their current forces was insufficient.

They were just waiting, waiting for their reinforcements to arrive so they could massacre everyone else within the canyon.

Having roughly figured out the intentions of the Feng Family's martial practitioners, Qin Lie returned to his usual routine. While the three families mined, he once again began to wander amongst the mountain forest surrounding the canyon.

Only, he didn't continue with his cultivation of his martial way and instead paid attention to his surroundings from amidst the darkness.

"It is already July. If Grandpa wasn't mistaken, the Silver Winged Demon Wolves will be returning soon. If there weren't any Silver Winged Demon Wolves, then it would be best to inform Ling Yushi and immediately leave Celestial Wolf Mountain in case the reinforcements of the Feng Family besiege us. However, with the possible arrival of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, there are

just too many variables…”

Qin Lie secretly planned and prepared by himself, constantly and cautiously wandering around the proximity, secretly observing the situation from the darkness.

And like that, three days passed.

In the past three days, the Feng Family’s martial practitioners were constantly involved in minor conflicts with the Ling and Gao Families. Even Liu Yan was slowly becoming unable to bear it, having already severely reprimanded Feng Yi once for the increasingly unbridled actions of the Feng Family.

But, everyone thought that the excessive actions of the Feng Family was due to the stimulation of having found Fiery Solar Jade.

None of them had thought to think about it further…

Today, not only did Qin Lie secretly observe their surroundings during the day, he also took advantage of the time the Ling Family members were sleeping to slip away at night in order to secretly patrol the mountain forests as well, carefully preparing for the events to come.

After calculating the time, he knew that the reinforcements for the Feng Family could appear at any moment. Thus, he had to be extremely cautious.

At midnight, he hid his body amongst the dense foliage of an old tree. Just as he was resting with lidded eyes, he suddenly heard the sweeping sound of footsteps.

Poking his head out from the cover of leaves, he took advantage of the moonlight to look out over the distance in the direction the noise had come from. His face suddenly drained of color, and his heart felt as if it was about to explode — it was actually Shattered Ice Manor!

He saw fifty to sixty martial practitioners with Shattered Ice Manor's emblem on their chest steadily and calmly approaching.

They were deliberately taking light steps, making sure no loud noises were made. It was clear that they were preparing to unleash a sudden attack and take advantage of the people sleeping deeply in the canyon to kill them.

The person in front had a haggard face and sinister cold eyes. He seemed like an elder of Shattered Ice Manor and had undoubtedly cultivated to mid stage Natal Opening Realm!

Qin Lie only observed for a few seconds, chills running down his spine. He quickly descended from the trees.

He gingerly moved towards the canyon, afraid of making any sort of noise. Only after he had created a large enough distance between him and the others did he dare to speed up his pace and skim across the ground...

Chapter 27: Imminent Danger

"Shattered Ice Manor! They're from Shattered Ice Manor!"

Qin Lie tightened his brows with an extremely heavy heart. The moment he saw them arrive, his final doubts were also resolved.

The Feng Family and Shattered Ice Manor were in cahoots, so of course they wouldn't fear Nebula Pavilion taking revenge on them. When the deed was done, the Feng Family could even join Shattered Ice Manor and completely detach themselves from Nebula Pavilion.

Perhaps they had already been in contact with each other for a long time, but had just kept it well hidden under wraps until now.

A Fiery Solar Jade Mine was just too valuable, so valuable that the Feng Family could no longer stay their hand. Even if they were to expose themselves, they would do everything in their power to help Shattered Ice Manor snatch the mine for themselves!

A string of thoughts raced through Qin Lie's mind as he ran back towards the canyon at top speed. Strangely enough, he actually calmed down while listening to the wind sweeping past his ears.

Just like Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners comprised Hall Masters, Elders, and Manor Lords.

Normally, Hall Masters were composed of early stage Natal

Opening Realm practitioners and Elders were all at mid stage Natal Opening Realm. Additionally, a single elder would normally have two or three Hall Masters serving under them.

If Shattered Ice Manor had sent an elder after them, then they must have brought their Hall Masters along as well, and if another fifty to sixty Refinement Realm martial practitioners were added into the mix, even without the Feng Family's assistance, there were more than enough people to destroy them all! The Ling Family, the Gao Family, Liu Yan and his men, everyone!

From way Shattered Ice Manor was coming after them, it was pretty clear that they would do anything to seize the Fiery Solar Jade Mine for themselves. They would never allow any word of it to leak out.

It also meant that the moment they arrived there would be a bloodbath, and not a single man would be left alive!

Even if the Ling Family, the Gao Family, and Liu Yan combined forces, there wasn't the slightest chance of them winning this fight. Their only hope was to escape the canyon as quickly as possible before Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners arrived!

Qin Lie's brain spun faster than ever before as he ran. Now that they were at the crossroad between life and death, he no longer had any plans to continue acting like a fool. He would have to use everything in his arsenal to survive this crisis.

He hid a bitter smile in his heart. If only he could've figured out that the Shattered Ice Manor was Feng Family's reinforcements sooner, he would never have taken this risk and have instead informed Ling Yushi to escape with the other Ling Family members two days prior.

Unfortunately, no battle plan survives contact with the enemy. Not only were the elites of Shattered Ice Manor coming after them, they were also led by an Elder. In an instant, they were forced to the verge of despair.

The martial practitioners of the three families all camped at three different directions in the canyon. Everyone was asleep beneath the night sky.

Because this place was slightly remote and the fact that there hadn't even been a single encounter with a spirit beast, no one had the mind to put people on night watch thus far. There were only a few defensive traps that were set up around camp.

Skillfully avoiding the traps, Qin Lie made his way to the Ling Family's camp. The Ling Family's martial practitioners were all divided up, two people to a tent, and he was the only one who had a single tent to himself.

Most of the Ling Family's martial practitioners were clumped up in one place, and only Ling Yushi and Ling Ying resided slightly further away because they were women.

He quietly crept towards Ling Yushi and Ling Ying's tent before

making just a tiny bit of noise...

"Who is it?"

Ling Yushi alertly asked and pulled at Ling Ying who was also in the tent. Both of them were only wearing thin cottonwear when they poked their heads up drowsily.

Then they took a glance at Qin Lie and suddenly froze. Both their eyes immediately lit up with surprise!

Under the night's sky, Qin Lie stood outside the tent alone and made a shushing gesture, signalling both of them to remain silent.

Not long ago his eyes had seemed like they would stay vacant for all eternity. But now they were both completely bright and clear like a pair of cold stars beneath the moonlight. He was naturally good-looking in the first place, but at this very moment, he looked so handsome that it was almost devilish. The sight caused both Ling Yushi and Ling Ying's jaws to fall open, feeling as if they had fallen out of reality.

"I must still be dreaming..." Ling Ying whispered to herself and rubbed her eyes, looking like she was trying really hard to wake up.

Ling Yushi had known that Qin Lie was more than he seemed since long ago, so she quickly calmed down after zoning out a little. She smiled lightly while looking at him with starry eyes, and

asked, “So, what are you planning to do in the middle of the night?”

“Let me in first.” Qin Lie looked around until he was sure that everyone was asleep before speaking in a low, serious tone, “Martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor are coming. At most, they’ll be arriving in an hour, and if we don’t make a move soon enough, then every Ling Family member in this canyon is going to die.”

The moment he said those words, Ling Yushi’s pretty face abruptly turned pale white. Ling Ying was covering her mouth in shock as well as she appeared to have finally woken up completely.

She stared at Qin Lie like he was a monster. At this moment, Qin Lie was a total stranger in her eyes, completely different from the Qin Lie from before.

“Get inside!” Ling Yushi instantly made up her mind and forcefully pulled Qin Lie inside. The moment she covered up the tent, she asked urgently, “What’s going on?”

Within the tent, Ling Yushi and Ling Ying pressed against each other with messy hair and eyes filled with great doubt.

“Gao Yuan, who was supposed to return and report back to the Gao Family was killed a long time ago; I found his body by accident. If my assumptions are correct, he was most likely done in by that person from the Feng Family who had left later. Fiery Solar Jade is far too valuable; the Feng Family must have betrayed you

all. I was scouting outside just now, and I saw fifty to sixty Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners coming our way with an Elder at the front…”

Qin Lie explained quickly without heed to the surprised look on their faces, then said, “There’s no time. We have to leave this place right now or none of us will be left alive when those Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners arrive.”

Because Ling Ying was still terribly shocked by the sight of a speaking Qin Lie, she could not immediately calm herself down and consider the grave matter that Qin Lie had just revealed to them.

But Ling Yushi had already figured out long ago that Qin Lie was not ordinary and quickly adjusted herself. The moment Qin Lie finished, she felt as if she had fallen into ice, and with fear and shock leaking from her eyes, she urgently asked, “Do you have any hard proof that it was the Feng Family?”

Qin Lie shook his head.

“If we don’t have proof, then we cannot accuse the Feng Family, and if we aren’t careful with our words, the Feng Family might even turn it around and cause both the Gao Family and Liu Yan to suspect us instead.” Ling Yushi burned with impatience, feeling that every second wasted was a step closer towards death. She yelled, “What do you think we should do?”

“If you don’t want to see the Ling Family annihilated, then you

should withdraw immediately! If you're afraid that the others would suspect us, then... tell them that I've gone missing somewhere in front of the canyon and that you and the rest of the household are looking for me!" Qin Lie didn't hide his intentions and decisively said, "The way back has already been cut off by Shattered Ice Manor, so the remaining path is to go through the canyons and enter deep into the Arctic Mountain Range!"

If the Silver Winged Demon Wolves were to return to Celestial Wolf Mountain, they would also be returning from deep inside the mountain range. This meant that if they moved towards that direction, then there was a very high chance that they would run into the wolf pack.

Which was exactly what he needed right now.

"Shouldn't we inform Liu Yan and the Gao Family?" Ling Ying finally recovered and stared straight at Qin Lie as if she were re-acquainting herself with him all over again. "If we don't inform them and your assumptions are correct, then wouldn't we be leaving them for dead?"

"Even if we told them, they might not necessarily believe us. Worse still, the Feng Family might even realize that something is amiss and drag us into the mess. We won't be able to leave the canyon immediately." Qin Lie frowned and said in a low tone, "Also, we have a higher chance of survival with them covering our backs. At the very least, they could slow down Shattered Ice Manor..."

"How ruthless!"

Both Ling Yushi and Ling Ying's hearts turned frosty, and they stared at Qin Lie with a strange look the moment they heard those words.

"Okay. Qin Lie, please proceed to the Arctic Mountain Range right now, and once you're gone, I'll wake Ling Feng and the others up to go searching for you!" Ling Yushi grit her teeth, aware that there was no time to hesitate at a critical moment like this. While she was speaking, she had already taken out a pen and paper and swiftly wrote something.

"Got it." Qin Lie nodded his head, lifted the blinds, and exited the tent immediately.

"Oh my. First Miss, you're so bad! You've fooled us all!" Ling Ying exclaimed softly with glowing eyes. She said, "It's like he's a changed man the moment his eyes lit up! Not only is he incredibly handsome, he's so, so..."

"What?" Ling Yushi impatiently shot her a glance.

"So attractive!" Ling Ying finally found the adjective and questioned in a sweet tone, "How is this possible? Isn't he only fifteen years old?"

"Foolish girl! We have a crisis on our hands and you're thinking about this?" Ling Yushi shot her a glare. She then gave her a few instructions before walking out of the tent and woke up Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and the others one by one. She told them that Qin Lie

had gone missing and requested their help search to for him together.

Ling Xin and the others were deep asleep, so they were incredibly unhappy to begin with when they were woken up from their dreams. The moment they heard that it was to find that idiot Qin Lie, their complaints and anger immediately increased tenfold, and if it wasn't for Ling Yushi's reputation, they would've exploded with curses already.

The commotion was loud enough to wake Liu Yan, Gao Yu, and Feng Yi from their sleep, and when they confirmed the situation, they too cursed loudly that it would be a given if the idiot turned up dead later. They even told the Ling Family to keep it down as much as possible and not disturb their sleep.

"Let's go. Bring your weapons along just in case we need them," Ling Yushi ordered, and ignoring the grumbles of her people, she began leading the way deep into the canyon.

There was nothing they could do, so they followed Ling Yushi while cursing Qin Lie on the side and gradually left the camp site.

"Everyone, follow Ling Ying and leave this place as quickly as possible!" The moment they pulled away from the other two families, Ling Yushi abruptly turned around and shouted with an extremely serious look.

"First Miss, what's going on?" Ling Feng was the first to notice something was amiss.

“No time for questions. Ling Feng, you will lead everyone else with Ling Ying and escape at full speed deep into the Arctic Mountain Range!” Ling Yushi loudly ordered.

“Big Brother Ling, I’ll tell you later, so bring your men over already!” Ling Ying beckoned him over.

Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and the rest of the Ling Family all wore doubtful expressions on their faces, but they obeyed her orders nonetheless and swiftly left the canyon.

Ling Yushi stayed at the very back of the group. It was only until after they had retreated for a while that she pulled out the arrow that she had prepared some time ago, aimed, and then fired it at Liu Yan’s tent. A letter had been tied to it.

“Swoosh!”

The arrow flew over with a piercing sound. The expression of Liu Yan, who hadn’t fallen asleep yet, changed when he heard the noise and flipped open the blinds with a start.

“Pwack!”

The arrow landed right in front of his tent.

Liu Yan’s face turned cold for a second, but then he noticed the

letter on the arrow and immediately grabbed it to read it. A single glance was all it took for his face to lose its color as he exclaimed in a low tone, “Gao Yu!”

Gao Yu’s tent was closer to his, so upon hearing his call, he immediately rushed over with a cold look in his eyes and asked, “I heard an arrow. Who was it?”

“Big Brother Liu, what’s going on over there?” Although Feng Yi was a bit further away, he too vaguely heard the vague sound of a piercing arrow. He wasn’t too sure about the it and could not help but call out in askance.

“It’s nothing. Those Ling bastards woke me up and I couldn’t sleep, so I got out to stretch my body a little.”

Liu Yan replied with a strange look on his face before signalling to Gao Yu meaningfully. The moment the two of them entered his tent, he immediately passed over the letter Ling Yushi sent over to Gao Yu.

“Gao Yuan is dead. The Feng Family has colluded with Shattered Ice Manor, and they plan to seize the Fiery Solar Jade Mine for themselves. An Elder and his team from Shattered Ice Manor is on their way, and they will enter the canyon in about an hour.”

It also took Gao Yu only a glance to feel his entire body turn cold, and his already cold eyes burned with a terrible chill.

Chapter 28: Hunted

Gao Yu held the letter in his hands, slightly shaking. He felt the blood rush to his head, and his cold, dark eyes were filled thick with murderous intent.

"Young Master Gao, what do think about this?" Liu Yan also felt like his limbs were as cold as ice as he asked with a frigid face.

"The entire Ling Family have evacuated, and that surely must be proof that Shattered Ice Manor's men are closing in. The reason they didn't talk to us personally and took such a roundabout manner was probably because they didn't have conclusive evidence to accuse the Feng Family. They're afraid that we wouldn't believe them and would only slow them down instead," Gao Yu said with a cool expression, and continuing on, "By evacuating en masse, they were already sending us the clearest signal about how serious the situation is!"

"Right." Liu Yan nodded his head and said with a heavy face, "We probably don't have much time left."

"I'll inform our clansmen to depart for the Arctic Mountain Range immediately. It would be best if we don't alert the Feng Family, but that is probably impossible."

Gao Yu knew very well in his heart that the Ling Family's unusual departure must have caused Feng Yi and the other to feel suspicious, and if they were to leave right after, then surely they wouldn't be able to hide it from the Feng Family any longer.

If the Feng Family and Shattered Ice Manor were truly in cahoots, then they were bound to lose their cool and act against them by blocking their way.

“The Ling Family sure acts fast. They are gone just like that, and we’re slower, already one step behind them. This is probably not going to be easy.” Liu Yan let out a sigh and continued, “The Ling Family member has been with us this entire time, and there wasn’t anyone who left the camp. Where did they get the news?”

“It was that guy called Qin Lie! He was the only one who was moving freely this entire time!” Gao Yu let out a hmph.

“That simpleton?” Liu Yan shockingly questioned.

“Simpleton?” Gao Yu’s eyes were chilly as he sucked in a deep breath and exclaimed coldly, “He’s the real ruthless character in the entire Ling Family! The Ling Family had acted promptly and retreated, causing us to be left behind, so now we are forced to endure both Shattered Ice Manor and the Feng Family’s attacks,buying them time to escape! What a diabolical bastard!”

Liu Yan gave it some thought and realized that, other than Qin Lie, there really was no other person from the Ling Family who left their sight. Hence, he too became as sure as Gao Yu that the mastermind behind the Ling Family was none other than Qin Lie!

“They’re totally planning to sacrifice us to buy time. Truly, they are both ruthless and diabolical alright!” Liu Yan too let out a sigh.

“That damned Qin Lie!”

Gao Yu let out an angry curse before immediately leaving Liu Yan’s tent in a hurry. He began to quietly inform the Gao Family and have them evacuate deep into the canyon as quietly as possible.

“Big Brother Liu, Brother Gao, just what are you guys doing? It’s the middle of the night, can it be that someone among you have gotten lost as well?”

Feng Yi had already noticed something was amiss for a while now, and upon seeing the Gao Family quietly attempting to leave, he immediately realized that something must have gone wrong with the plan after giving it some thought.

He wasn’t sure how such a meticulous plan could have gone wrong, but he knew for sure that it must have been exposed.

Gao Yu paid him no heed at all, and that dark and cold pair of eyes of his brutally stabbed at him once before he led the Gao Family to rush into the deeper parts of the canyon.

He knew very well that the men from Shattered Ice Manor would be arriving very soon. If he tried to confront Feng Yi now, it would be no different from committing suicide, so he could only endure it and urge the Gao Family members to escape as soon as possible.

“Young Master!” Watching the Ling Family and now the Gao Family leaving one by one as well, Feng Lun’s eyes became filled with murderous intent as he asked, “How did they find out?”

Feng Yi frowned deeply as he watched the Gao Family members rush deep into the canyon, but he could not think of a reason.

After a moment’s hesitation, he took out a strange-looking horn and blew out in a low, quiet tune.

The same kind of sound suddenly came from behind them, and after a start Feng Yi soon came to a complete understanding.

“Shattered Ice Manor’s men are here. I do not know how they found out, but there’s been a change in our plans!” Feng Yi calmed down and blew the horn again, and this time, its sound turned rapid and high-pitched.

In the forest, the Shattered Ice Manor’s elder listened to the horn sound as his face darkened. He uttered darkly, “Garbage! We made all these preparations and they still found out beforehand? How completely useless! Listen to me, bastards! They already know we’re here, so let’s cut the sneaky shit and kill them all already! Not a single Ling or Gao clansmen will be left alive!”

Shattered Ice Manor’s martial practitioners instantly howled their replies and charged towards the canyon at full speed.

Around the same time, Feng Yi roared his order as well, “Attack!”

The expressions of Feng Lun and the rest of the Feng Family's martial practitioners changed, filling with murderous intent. Noticing that the Gao Family weren't completely out of sight,, they immediately brought out their bows, spears, lances, and other long ranged ice blades and ran after them with increasing speed, all the while firing the sharp blades in their hands.

Amidst shrill howls, a rain of frigid lights soared above the valley and headed straight towards the Gao Family martial practitioners!

"Feng Yi! The Feng Family will definitely be wiped out due to your actions here today!"

Liu Yan exploded into a roar as a surge of spirit energy suddenly ballooned from inside his slightly overweight body. Immediately afterwards, circle after circle of swirling spirit energy promptly exited his sleeves and flew up into the sky, forming clusters of spirit barriers that disrupted all the projectiles coming their way so they could not accurately stab into a person's body.

A sliver of anxiety appeared on Feng Yi's handsome face due to Liu Yan's angry roar.

Just then, a series of eerie howls came from behind him, and Feng Yi immediately calmed down as he spoke to Liu Yan, "Big Brother Liu, if we kill both you and the entire Liu Family members here and come up with some random excuse later, then who will know what role the Feng Family played in this incident? Besides, with Shattered Ice Manor here, even if you did find out the truth,

the Feng Family may not necessarily have to fear you at all! Keep shooting and slow them down!”

Upon hearing his words, the Feng Family’s martial practitioners grinned sinisterly and continued their offense with a newfound vigor.

Wave after wave of eerie howls sounded from behind the Feng Family, and the bottom of Liu Yan’s heart turned ice cold. Without slowing, he yelled out, “Gao Yu! They’re almost here! Retreat at full force out of the canyons; the Arctic Mountain Range is right behind it, and there will be much larger grounds and spirit beasts about! There will be a lot more variables there!”

He didn’t need to say more as Gao Yu and the rest of the Gao Family members cycled their spirit energy throughout their entire bodies and ran as if they were flying, hastening like leopards towards the direction of the deeper parts of the Arctic Mountain Range.

The canyons of Celestial Wolf Mountain was both tight and narrow, with no available hiding spots at all. Once the others caught up to them, there would be little to no chance that the Gao Family members would survive.

Only by escaping out of the canyon and entering the vast Arctic Mountain Range would they be able to find cover. Also, the appearance of spirit beasts would likely cover their tracks and cause Shattered Ice Manor and the Feng Family’s men to hesitate, thus greatly increasing their hopes of survival.

In order to confirm Shattered Ice Manor's arrival, the Feng Family did not act when the Gao Family evacuated and thus missed out on a golden opportunity. At this moment, the Gao Family had already ditched them, and were way back in the rear, Furthermore, there was Liu Yan, who was an early stage Natal Opening Realm practitioner, around, their blades missed over and over, so they soon gave up their relentless chase.

Thus, a strange situation had formed inside the canyon where the Gao Family ran and the Feng Family gave chase, and further back, the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor were also chasing after the Feng Family.

If one looked at it from a larger point of view, then one could also find the Ling Family's martial practitioners at the foremost of the lot, also desperately trying to escape.

Because they were the ones who had ran first and Ling Yushi also took a while before she finally fired that arrow, the Ling Family were the ones who managed to escape the furthest. At the moment, they had long since evacuated from the canyon and entered into the vast forests of the Arctic Mountain Range.

Under the clear moonlight, Qin Lie stood beneath a tree and waited for the Ling Family's martial practitioners to arrive.

When Ling Yushi was writing her letter, waking the Ling Family one by one and making careful arrangements, he had long since exited the canyon. Right now, he had already waited under the tree

for nearly fifteen minutes.

"Haah, haah, haah!"

The sound of martial practitioners running at top speed gradually came from a distance. Qin Lie narrowed his eyes and quietly hid behind the tree, just in case the ones who appeared weren't the Ling Family; he didn't want any accidents.

It wasn't until he saw Ling Feng's figure that he finally stepped out of the tree and stood in front of the crowd.

Ling Ying, Ling Feng, Ling Xin and the rest of the Ling Family members stopped in their tracks the moment they saw him from afar. Everyone had stared dubiously at this fool who was no longer acting like one...

"Kid, if you made a mistake, then you will doom the Ling Family!" Ling Xin let out a hmph.

Ling Feng furrowed his eyebrows and asked for confirmation in a low tone, "You saw Shattered Ice Manor's men with your own eyes?"

Qin Lie nodded and asked right away, "Where is she?" He didn't say her name, but everyone knew who he was talking about.

"The First Miss stayed behind at the very back. She wrote a letter to inform Liu Yan and the Gao Family; she should be on her way to

regroup with us right now." Ling Ying peered at him as if she had suddenly grown infinitely interested in him and asked, "How did you find out that Gao Yuan was killed? How did you guess that there would be people coming after us? Could it be that you were keeping watch nearby for the past few days?"

Qin Lie threw her a glance, but kept quiet and didn't answer any of her questions.

While he was in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, Ling Ying's attitude had never been the friendliest, and some of the stuff she said was never quite pleasant to the ears...

"W-what's up with you?" Ling Ying exclaimed, peeved. "When did I ever offend you? Oh, I know, it's when you were acting like a fool, right? You were the one who wanted to act like a fool; don't tell me you can't stand us commenting a little about it?"

Qin Lie still didn't pay her any attention.

"You have quite the large temper, don't you brat?" Ling Xin shot him a glare and yelled, "You had better not be mistaken, otherwise, the Ling Family will be in big trouble! And you will not get out of this scot free either!"

"Be quiet!" Ling Feng scolded. "Since he saw it with his own eyes, it will definitely not be a mistake. If he hadn't informed us, then we could very well be dying at the hands of those men from Shattered Ice Manor right now. Everyone would all be slaughtered one by one, and the First Miss and Little Ying's fate... will be far

worse!”

The crowd felt chilled to the bone as they listened to Ling Feng’s depiction and pondered upon it themselves. Even Ling Ying, who was slightly dissatisfied with Qin Lie no longer said anything. There was lingering fear leaking out her bright eyes.

The crowd turned silent.

After a short while, Ling Yushi flew right over by herself with sweat atop her pale forehead. It was clear that she had also been running at top speed Seeing that the crowd members had waited for her, she yelled, “Why are you guys standing here doing nothing? Why aren’t you running?”

“First Miss, after you fired the arrow, did you notice anything amiss?” Ling Xin asked.

“I didn’t dare to take a look.” Ling Yushi’s smile was bitter as she took the chance to take a breather before saying, “While I was chasing you guys, I vaguely heard the sounds of fighting. It’s probably… the Feng Family attacking.”

Everyone’s face turned pale in an instant; at this point, they had all concluded that Qin Lie was telling the truth.

“What are you still standing here for?” Ling Yushi yelled angrily with clear dread in her voice. “If we don’t pull away far enough during the night, then Shattered Ice Manor’s men will be able to

follow us quickly through our tracks during the day!”

After that, the crowd quickly set out and escaped towards the depths of the Arctic Mountain Range at full speed. At this point, everyone’s expressions were heavy, and they felt a heavy pressure pressing against their backs.

“Follow me.” Qin Lie, who had been silent for a while suddenly appeared at the forefront of the group like an arrow and yelled in a low tone, “There are a lot of spirit beast nests at the front, we must avoid them. Otherwise we will be torn to shreds before the Feng Family or Shattered Ice Manor even arrive!”

All were dumbstruck.

……

Chapter 29: Encounter

Deep in the night.

Qin Lie walked at the front as he led the Ling Family members towards the depths of the Arctic Mountain Range. He periodically paused from time to time to retrieve a map from his chest pocket. Using the moonlight, he would look at the map and then reorient their direction.

Most of the time, he didn't lead the Ling Family members in a straight path. Whenever he thought there might be a pack of spirit beasts in front of them, he would make a detour to avoid any unnecessary spirit beast encounters.

Because they frequently traveled in a winding manner instead of in a straight line, their travel speed towards the Arctic Mountain Range wasn't very fast.

However, during their travels, they managed to avoid encountering any fierce spirit beasts. They would occasionally meet one or two, but they would only be low level ones that couldn't harm them at all.

After Qin Lie had discovered Gao Yuan's body, he had already planned and prepared for this in secret. He had already thoroughly studied their escape route long ago, and even personally examined it himself. Due to his grandfather's map, he had a clear picture of all the common spots spirit beasts would gather at nearby and was thus able to safely guide the Ling Family members.

Only, a portion of the Ling Family members didn't quite trust him...

"We're making another detour?" Ling Xin was currently standing still upon a steep slope, his face full of annoyance as he complained, "How many detours have we taken so far? If we hadn't detoured so many times, we would have already exited the dense forest and have entered this Frost Mist Mountain you were talking about long ago! Spirit beast this, spirit beast that, we haven't even seen any traces of powerful spirit beasts so far! If we keep detouring like this, sooner or later they'll catch up to us!"

"Anyone who doesn't want to take these detours can go straight ahead. After all, whether you live or die doesn't matter to me." Qin Lie didn't even bat an eye, continuing upon the path that he himself had determined was correct.

"Brat! You really think you're something, don't you?" angrily snorted Ling Xin as he glared at Qin Lie.

"Shut your mouth!" exclaimed Ling Yushi. "If not for Qin Lie's intelligence, we probably would have already died long ago at the hands of Shattered Ice Manor's people. What are you still complaining about?"

"First Miss, I only believe that there are no spirit beasts nearby, so we don't need to be this cautious. After all, the Feng Family and Shattered Ice Manor's people should already be on our tail. If we keep detouring like this, they will catch up to us in no time,"

complained Ling Xin.

“That’s enough. Everyone, follow Qin Lie and let’s quickly move out of this dense forest,” said Ling Feng.

Only a few people were agitated like Ling Xin. The rest of them were rather trusting towards Ling Yushi and Ling Feng and thus were rather well behaved.

Once Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and Ling Ying all began to rush after Qin Lie, Ling Xin and the rest had no other choice but to also follow behind them.

The night quickly passed, and even after the crack of dawn, they didn’t stop and continued rushing through the forest.

During this time, Qin Lie led everyone through more detours, avoiding other potential hotspots that could be infested with packs of spirit beasts, and once again delayed their progress. Although Ling Xin and a few others were still discontented, after being scolded by Ling Yushi and Ling Feng, they had no choice but to silently follow.

Noon.

Qin Lie and all the Ling Family members gathered beside a stream within the dense forest, and their frantic breathing gradually calmed down.

From the middle of last night until noon today, everyone had been frantically rushing along, consuming a great amount of spirit energy. Their bodies were tired, and adding on the fact that they hadn't eaten anything, they were pretty much ready to collapse at any moment. Thus, they had to stop to rest so they could eat and recover.

Everyone gathered beside the stream, gulped down mouthful after mouthful of the slightly sweet spring water and ate the dry meat that they had brought with them. They sat down and attuned their breathing and recovered their spirit energy.

They were all extremely tired. Knowing just how precious this moment of rest was, they didn't bother speaking to each other and simply recovered in silence.

Qin Lie drank some water and ate some of the meat that Ling Yushi gave him. Narrowing his eyes slightly, he took out a Spirit Recovering Pill to recover.

"What level is your cultivation at? After traveling all this time, everyone is almost tired to the point of collapsing, even First Miss has sweat all over her. But you seem like you're still pretty energetic..." Ling Ying sat down next to him, her exquisite body also drenched in fragrant sweat as it dripped down along her curves. Her eyes lit up, and she asked, "You have truly hidden yourself quite well. I guess your level of cultivation definitely isn't low!"

Out of everyone here, Qin Lie and Ling Ying were the youngest. In the past, she had never bothered to pay any attention to him

and had even said a few things which were unpleasant to hear.

However, after witnessing Qin Lie's sudden transformation, her interest towards him had gradually begun to increase, almost eclipsing her interest towards Ling Feng.

The Ling Family didn't have many outstanding youths. As Du Heng and Du Fei didn't count, the only person she paid attention to within the Ling Family was Ling Feng. Thus, in the past, she had always stuck around Ling Feng and held a great amount of interest towards him.

However, Qin Lie's recent transformation had managed to light up her eyes as well, causing her to feel a sense of surprise as if she had discovered some new foreign land.

Adding Qin Lie's mysterious origins and his many hidden secrets, she had become increasingly curious. Thus, her sense of attraction continuously grew stronger, resulting in her paying more and more attention to Qin Lie lately.

"You brats know how to act quite well!" exclaimed Ling Xin as he looked over, secretly swearing to himself, "I can't beat Ling Feng, but could it be that I can't even beat Qin Lie? Little Ying, why must you be so close to him?"

"Stop disturbing him and use this time to properly cultivate like you should be!"

Upon seeing Ling Ying sitting down next to Qin Lie and talking to him, Ling Yushi, who wasn't far away, suddenly felt some discomfort within her heart. Snorting, she snapped at Ling Ying.

Ling Ying pouted with her little mouth, letting out a tender hmph. Her face was full of discontent as she secretly thought: What are you getting mad over? You two are only engaged. It's not like you two are married, do you need to shield him like this?

While the Ling Family's people were resting, Shattered Ice Manor and the Feng Family's people were chasing down and killing the Gao Family's people and Liu Yan within the dense forest.

As none of these sides were familiar with the dense forest, they frequently encountered packs of spirit beasts as they rushed in from the canyon. It wasn't a very smooth ride for them.

When the Gao Family and Liu Yan tried to escape, their luck wasn't good considering that they encountered a Rank Two Golden Crag Beast blocking their path. Golden Crag Beasts had extremely violent natures, and thus, it had attacked them crazily. Liu Yan and Gao Yu had no choice but to work together to kill the Golden Crag Beast, which delayed them.

As Shattered Ice Manor and the Feng Family's people gave chase, they intruded into the territory of the Rank Two Dragonhorn Rhinoceros and encountered two frenzied Dragonhorn Rhinoceros. Several people were trampled to death before Shattered Ice Manor's experts arrived and quickly killed them.

The three sides moved through the dense forest. Because they didn't know the distribution of spirit beasts, they didn't bother taking detours. While their speed was much greater than Qin Lie and his group, they would time and time again encounter spirit beasts, thus suffering successive casualties.

Although Shattered Ice Manor constantly suffered some casualties, because they had quite a few experts, their path could be said to be fairly smooth.

"There are fresh tracks over here. They don't seem like the Gao Family's and should be of the Ling Family who escaped first," deduced an old man of Shattered Ice Manor. This man's cultivation wasn't very high, but he was very good at tracking. He crouched at the clearing for a while, then pointed in a direction and concluded, "From their tracks, they shouldn't be too far away from us. Elder Yan, we can split off a group to go kill them."

As soon as the leader of Shattered Ice Manor's group, Yan Dewu, heard this, he immediately prepared to arrange a group to chase after them. However, at this time, Feng Yi suddenly volunteered, saying, "Elder Yan, the Ling Family is the weakest. Just my Feng Family is enough to get rid of them. Meanwhile, Gao Yu and Liu Yan are much more important. After all, Liu Yan is at the Natal Opening Realm. You must not take him lightly. The Ling Family... why don't you let my family chase and kill them. I guarantee that we can definitely kill them all!"

"Are you sure?" asked Yan Dewu with a dark expression.

“Mn, there will not be a problem,” guaranteed Feng Yi with a smile.

Yan Dewu nodded, coldly laughed, and said, “Then your Feng Family can go chase them down. If there is a problem, then come find us again and I will arrange for people to go and support you.”

“Many thanks, Elder Yan!” After thanking Yan Dewu, Feng Yi left with his family members, chasing in the direction of the fleeing Ling Family.

“Elder Yan, can his Feng Family truly get rid of the Ling Family?” asked the martial practitioner of Shattered Ice Manor that was proficient in tracking.

“That little bastard of the Feng Family has thoughts towards the two girls of the Ling Family, so I might as well let them go. After all, that youngster knows what to do. I assume he will go about the job attentively, and if they suffer losses, oh well. With our speed and strength, if we go and kill Liu Yan’s group before killing the Ling Family, we will only be delayed for at most a day,” said Yan Dewu indifferently.

“Elder’s words are indeed wise,” complimented everyone.

……

“The Ling Family left long before us, but are actually not too far from us. From the looks of it, their speed must have been rather

slow. So strange," Feng Lun commented perplexedly after leaving Shattered Ice Manor's group.

"If you were bringing along a fool as you rushed along a path, you wouldn't be much faster! Furthermore, the road so far has been infested with spirit beasts. Even though we traveled with Shattered Ice Manor, Feng Jie and a few others are still injured, and Shattered Ice Manor even lost seven practitioners. Do you think the Ling Family would be spared from this problem?" Feng Yi casually explained, not the slightest bit surprised.

"Indeed." Feng Lun nodded and then immediately laughed, "Hehe, I have stared at that cute little Ling Ying's skin for so long, it's just so hot and sexy! When we encounter them in a while, brother, please stay your hand, you must not accidentally kill her!"

"Be at ease Brother Lun, this younger brother is also interested. After we capture them, you can go first, but you must let us younger brothers also have a taste," laughed Feng Jie.

"You're all injured, but your obscene nature doesn't change! Okay, if she doesn't die when I play with her, I will leave her for you to have fun with!" laughingly scolded Feng Lun.

"I shall capture Ling Yushi and bring her home," said Feng Yi, furrowing his brows. Turning his head, he said, "When we attack, you all must be careful. Don't injure her."

"Hehe, young master is indeed different from us, a true flower lover. Be at ease, we will definitely not injure her," quickly

declared Feng Jie.

“Remember, we cannot let a single one of them escape. This is a matter which affects the safety of the Feng Family, we must be ruthless!” sternly said Feng Yi.

The Feng Family members all replied in understanding.

An hour passed.

The Feng Family’s group quietly approached the stream that Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, and the others were resting at. From amongst the cluster of trees in the distance, Feng Yi and the rest could see the shadows of Ling Family members. An excited look emerged on their faces as killing intent gradually coalesced within their eyes.

Under Feng Yi’s signals, the Feng Family practitioners silently scattered, forming a semi-closed circular formation as they inched closer towards Qin Lie and the others.

“We have caught up to them.”

Seeing the formation completed, Feng Yi slightly smiled. Not the slightest bit afraid, he loudly shouted, revealing himself along with the other Feng Family members as they walked out in front of Qin Lie and the others.

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Chapter 30: Bloody Battle

“Shit! You made us wind round and round repeatedly, and now they have caught up to us. Are you satisfied now?”

Ling Xin, with a longblade in his hands, suddenly stood up and erupted. He glared at Qin Lie who was sitting cross legged on the ground with eyes full of rage.

Many of the Ling Family members who had been singing the same note as him also bitterly looked towards Qin Lie, believing that it was Qin Lie’s mistake which had wasted their time, thus allowing the members of the Feng Family to catch up.

Qin Lie’s eyes narrowed slightly, his expression becoming colder. He didn’t respond to Ling Xin’s provocation.

“Shut up! Is this even the time for us to quarrel?”

Ling Feng rebuked and, in but a moment, took out his Firecloud Hammer spirit artifact. A current of fiery light ignited atop the hammer, bathing his arm in a crimson shade and causing the temperature around him to become extremely hot.

Ling Yushi bit her lower lip and, with a dignified expression, took out two silver hoops which were inscribed with exquisite designs from her waist. She stood in front of Qin Lie, quietly whispering to him, “Feng Yi is at the eighth level of Refinement, and many of his Feng Family members are at the sixth and seventh levels. Although they have less people than us, their power is indeed much greater.

Ling Ying doesn't have any battle experience, and you... I don't know much about you. You must be careful, do not try to do anything to show off."

She stopped speaking and raised her head to look up towards Feng Yi. Frowning, she sadly asked, "I never thought that it would really be you guys. Why are you doing this?"

Ling Xin, Ling Ying, and the others all grouped together with one another, their expressions solemn as they took out their weapons and prepared to face off against the Feng Family's fierce offensive.

"To tell you the truth, the Feng Family aligned itself with Shattered Ice Manor two years ago, we just never announced it because we hoped to redeem great merits at a critical juncture." Atop Feng Yi's extraordinarily handsome face, a sunny smile emerged, "Fiery Solar Jade is just too valuable. An entire mine of it is definitely worth us exposing ourselves. However, in order to make sure this information doesn't leak out, we can only be ruthless."

Feng Lun and Feng Jie both grinned, laughing strangely as their eyes clearly swept across Ling Ying's body. It went without saying what their intentions were.

"Feng Yi, in the past we have fought together before, must we shed blood?" Ling Feng deeply shouted.

"There is no other way. If I don't get rid of you guys, then I will have to bear responsibilities in front of Shattered Ice Manor.

Because you guys were able to leave the canyon beforehand, I have already messed up. I really can't make a single mistake now."

Feng Yi was also frustrated. After a moment, he seriously said, "Yushi, although it isn't appropriate to say these words at this time, I still want to say them... from the first moment I saw you, I wanted to have you. After today, I will truly be able to have you. Be at ease, you will be left alive. I will bring you back to the Feng Family, lock you up, and never let you leave.

"Either you kill me, or I kill you. There are no other possibilities," responded Ling Yushi coldly.

Feng Yi laughed, not saying another word. He waved his hand, signaling Feng Lun and the others to move out.

"Kill!" Feng Lun began to laugh maniacally.

The Feng Family's martial practitioners immediately surged over, took out their weapons, and began circulating the spirit energy within their bodies. It caused their auras to be like vicious tigers charging down a mountain, extraordinarily ferocious.

There were a total of nine Feng Family practitioners. Aside from Feng Yi, there were two others who had the radiance of spirit energy emission from their hands when they rushed over. Clearly, they had cultivated to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm.

On the other hand, amongst the Ling Family, other than Ling

Yushi who had cultivated to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm and Ling Feng who was at the seventh level, the rest were all at the fifth and sixth levels. Although they had more people than the Feng Family, their overall strength was quite a bit weaker. Thus, it was no wonder that Feng Yi dared to come and kill the Ling Family clansmen with only the Feng Family's martial practitioners.

"Feng Lun, your opponent is me!" shouted Ling Feng darkly.

He ignited the Firecloud Hammer and began to fight with Feng Lun, who was the stronger of the two from the Feng Family who had cultivated to the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. They were evenly matched, tangling with each other once they got close.

Feng Yi slightly smiled. Unsheathing his sharp sword with a bright yellow hilt, he flicked his wrist, and an extremely sharp yellow sword beam that was longer than a meter exploded out from it as a result.

"Yushi, I congratulate you for having cultivated to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm, but I reached this level a year and a half ago. My Rainbow Hilt Sword is Common Grade Five, something that my brother got for me. If I remember correctly, your Twin Heart Hoops are only Common Grade Four. Heheh, there is no way you are a worthy opponent for me."

"Then come and try me!"

Ling Yushi's face trembled as she shouted, her fine black hair

suddenly beginning to flutter. Immediately afterwards, the two silver hoops she held in her hand released circle after circle of silver haloes of light.

“Cling cling!”

The two hoops collided, emitting a harsh, crisp sound. The sound wave entered straight into Feng Yi’s mind, rattling his psyche.

Taking advantage of this moment, Ling Yushi’s delicate body flashed, shooting towards Feng Yi like cold lightning. The silver hoop in her left hand suddenly flew out towards Feng Yi’s head, turning into a stream of silver light.

“It is much stronger than before.”

Feng Yi indifferently smiled and waved the Rainbow Hilt Sword in his hand. Immediately, three streams of golden rainbows appeared in front of him, blocking Ling Yushi’s stream of silver light.

Ling Yushi pursed her lips, not replying as she continued to condense spirit energy and use the Twin Heart Hoops to attack Feng Yi.

Feng Yi had a calm expression from start to finish, never initiating his own attack. It seemed as if he was waiting for Ling Yushi to run out of spirit energy so he could capture her alive.

On the other side, Ling Feng and Feng Yi were still evenly matched, but Feng Jie, the other seventh level practitioner, was unmatched against the rest of the Ling Family members.

Even when Ling Xin and Ling Ying combined their powers to fight Feng Jie, they were still badly battered by Feng Jie's short spear.

At this moment, Ling Xin's chest had already become bloody. Even if Feng Jie didn't continue attacking, it was only a matter of time before Ling Xin bled to death.

The remaining Feng and Ling Family martial practitioners were fighting in a great mass. Looking at the situation, it was clear that the Feng Family had the advantage as the Ling Family members constantly received more and more wounds. From the looks of it, it was only a matter of time before they lost.

Across the entire battleground, only Qin Lie had yet to move, and no Feng Family member had moved to attack him.

In their eyes, Qin Lie was still but a fool, a fool who just stood there and didn't move. Couldn't they kill him whenever they pleased? Why would they waste their energy on a fool like him?

This was precisely what Qin Lie was hoping for!

To be ignored so that he could suddenly strike and gain the advantage, that was what he was waiting for! Waiting for the best

opportunity, a moment where he could instantly kill someone!

“Whoosh!”

A silver spear was suddenly disarmed from a Ling Family member’s hand. It landed directly within half a meter in front of Qin Lie.

The Ling Family member who had lost his weapon was immediately pierced in the abdomen. Miserably crying out, he desperately caught ahold of the Feng Family member’s neck, ignoring his injured abdomen as he tried to wring the person’s neck.

Unfortunately, his weapon was no longer in his hand and his body was too severely injured. He didn’t have enough strength to achieve his goal and was stabbed a few more times in the chest, resulting in him falling to the bloodstained ground like a pool of mud.

His eyes were still wide open, unwillingly looking at the skies as if failing to kill his opponent had resulted in him being unable to rest in peace.

“Ling Yang!” Ling Xin’s eyes became extremely red. From the corners of his mouth, two streams of blood flowed down to his neck. He roared with rage, seeming to go out of control in an instant.

“Becoming anxious now? Hehe, I will also send you along the path now, so you can accompany your little cousin.”

Feng Jie grinned. The short spear in his hand, that was clearly a spirit artifact, suddenly shot out a dazzling bright light. The bright light shined upon Ling Ying and Ling Xin’s eyes, suddenly blinding them.

At this moment, he went so far as to lustily look at Ling Ying’s soft, rising mounds before piercing towards Ling Xin’s heart with his short spear.

This was the moment!

Qin Lie, who had yet to move from the start, suddenly pulled up the silver spear that was in front of him and madly infused the spirit energy of thunder and lightning hidden within his body into it.

Since the silver spear wasn’t a spirit artifact, it had no spirit diagram inscribed within it. Thus, it was unable to withstand such a violent infusion of spirit energy and suddenly began to emit sounds of fragmenting.

Qin Lie didn’t pay it much attention as he rotated his waist, throwing the silver spear with all of his might.

“Crackle crackle! Zzzt zzzt!”

The silver spear was like a world shocking lightning bolt. The spear's electric current was frighteningly violent, and the inside of the spear was constantly emitting popping sounds as it pierced straight through Feng Jie's heart.

"Boom!"

The violent spirit energy within the silver spear exploded!

The spearhead burst outright, and the frightening explosive power, similar to that of a landslide's outbreak, instantly injected itself into Feng Jie's back, causing his back to explode and leaving behind an extremely terrifyingly gigantic hole. From the bloody wound, blood, flesh, and bone dripped out everywhere in one melded mess. It was an extremely appalling scene.

Feng Jie had been instantly killed, not able to even able to make a sound!

In the instant when Ling Ying and Ling Xin were blinded, they had both thought it would be hard to escape death; both of them despaired as they waited for the short spear to penetrate their hearts.

Afterwards, they heard the terrifying sound of an explosion. When their eyes recovered, they saw Feng Jie's bloody, miserably torn apart corpse at their feet with a broken fragment of the spear still stuck in his heart.

The two of them were bewildered, unable to figure out what had just happened in that moment. When they recovered their senses, they realized that Qin Lie had suddenly come over and had quickly picked up Feng Jie's short spear when they were still dazed.

"Brat! You're still taking advantage of the moment at a time like this?!" Ling Xin suddenly snapped out of his daze, furiously roaring, "I really want to kill you, you shitty brat!"

Before he had finished swearing his outrage, Qin Lie had already picked up the short spear and turned, heading towards Ling Feng's direction.

His sudden usage of lightning and thunder to attack and kill Feng Jie had all happened in an instant.

Not only had the blinded Ling Ying and Ling Xin not seen it, even the surrounding members of the Feng and Ling Families who were focused on fighting didn't notice it. Thus, no one could explain to Ling Ying and Ling Xin what had happened.

"How did Feng Jie die?" muttered Ling Ying, her charming face filled with surprise.

"Only the devil knows!" The red-eyed Ling Xin breathed heavily, grinding his teeth. He continued, "Don't worry about it too much, I must take revenge for my younger cousin. I'm going to cut that guy into ten thousand pieces!"

“Mn!” Ling Ying also did not give the matter any more thought. After a heavy nod of her head, she went with Ling Xin to help their clansmen combat the remaining Feng Family practitioners.

At this moment, Qin Lie was rushing towards Feng Lun, his hand holding Feng Jie’s short spear, which was a Common Grade Three spirit artifact. It was the first, true spirit artifact that he had ever touched in his life!

When he infused his spirit energy within the spear and then used a strand of his mind energy to slightly feel around the inner workings of this low grade spirit artifact, his mind suddenly rumbled as an extremely odd expression suddenly appeared within his eyes.

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Chapter 31: Power Revealed!

A wisp of mind energy slowly entered into the spirit artifact, allowing Qin Lie to clearly see a simple and unrefined spirit diagram; it was “Spirit Gathering”!

Compared to the “Spirit Gathering” diagram Qin Lie was familiar with, it was like the difference between heaven and earth. Regardless of whether it was the spirit diagram’s precision, complexity, or size, they were all much too inferior!

Originally, in order to remember the “Spirit Gathering” diagram within the Soul Suppressing Orb, Qin Lie had spent a lot of effort in a bitter attempt to study it. Thus, he had a very profound understanding of “Spirit Gathering” diagrams and was almost able to instantly recognize the spirit diagram within the short spear.

The spirit diagram within the short spear was only a small part of the “Spirit Gathering” diagram that he was familiar with. It probably wasn’t even a tenth of the size of the “Spirit Gathering” diagram within the Soul Suppressing Orb. Moreover, the precision and connections of the inscription were poor, making it unable to fully utilize the the effects of a “Spirit Gathering” diagram.

A weird look appeared in Qin Lie’s eyes as an idea unconsciously emerged in his mind: If this can be considered a spirit artifact, then what would happen if I were to inscribe that extremely complex true ‘Spirit Gathering’ diagram into it?

“Crackle crackle crackle!”

He didn’t have time to think any longer as an electric current suddenly rippled around the short spear.

After he infused his spirit energy, the short spear began to flicker with lightning, as if it had suddenly absorbed and trapped a stream of lightning, and also bathed him in light.

“Hm? This is also possible?” silently exclaimed Qin Lie, immediately feeling around inwardly.

He discovered that when his berserking thunder and lightning energy were infused into the incomplete, simplistic, and crude “Spirit Gathering” diagram and circulated within, they would release the special characteristics within the spirit materials of the spirit artifact itself. Thus, the short spear became sharper and the spirit energy became slightly upgraded.

He immediately understood that even the simpler spirit diagrams could also be used to increase the power of the practitioner; this was true as long as they were able to draw out the innate characteristics of the spirit materials used in refining the spirit artifact!

“Qin Lie! Don’t come over!”

Ling Feng shouted, shaking the Firecloud Hammer in his hands and condensed cluster after cluster of fire clouds, which greatly raised the temperature. It was as if Feng Yun’s body had been encircled by red lanterns.

Feng Lun, who was similarly at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, wielded a double-edged axe. As it hacked and chopped, halo after halo of green light condensed.

Sometimes, the double bit axe would draw a circle, surprisingly forming a beautiful green wing of light. Not only could the green wing of light block the fire cloud clusters, it also forced Ling Feng to retreat after diffusing them.

Clearly, the green wing of light could not only defend, but also attack!

“Ling Feng, we are both very familiar with each other. Your Firecloud Hammer is a Grade Two spirit artifact whereas my Green Wing Axe is Grade Three! Our cultivation levels are the same, as is our spirit energy. However, my spirit artifact is better, and thus you cannot beat me,” Feng Lun chuckled, swinging the Green Wing Axe and forming another beautiful feathered wing, routing out the fire clouds.

They were martial practitioners of the same cultivation level, with their spirit energy effectively the same as well, which meant whoever had the higher quality spirit artifact held the advantage.

Feng Lun hefted the Green Wing Axe, full of self confidence and in no rush to risk his life. His job was to just make sure that Ling Feng couldn’t intervene in another battle so the Feng Family members could smoothly kill off the rest of the Ling Family clansmen.

Feng Lun's strategy would have been flawless if Feng Jie hadn't died, as Ling Xin would have died at his hands, which would then allowed Feng Jie to move on to killing the rest one by one.

However...

"Qin Lie! I said don't come over! Eh?"

Ling Feng suddenly cried in fear as he looked at Qin Lie, who was walking up behind Feng Lun, with a sliver of astonishment showing on his face.

Feng Lun didn't even bother looking behind him, and continued laughing weirdly, "Did you think that your acting would work? How could a fool cause me to divide my attention and look back? Ling Feng, please, your trick is so pathetic it's funny."

"Zzt zzt zzt zzt!"

The sound of a rippling electric current suddenly emanated from behind Feng Lun. He had just finished speaking when his expression suddenly underwent an immense change. He hastily disregarded the shocked Ling Feng as he abruptly looked behind him.

In Qin Lie's hand was what seemed to be a luminous, dazzlingly white lightning bolt. His body exuded an extremely violent and fierce aura, causing him to resemble a vicious beast galloping over.

“This is… that fool?”

Feng Lun was stunned, and subconsciously brandished his Green Wing Axe to form yet another green wing of light which he sent at Qin Lie.

An sharp burst of spirit energy surged over along with the green wing of light, causing Qin Lie’s expression to turn solemn.

However, he didn’t dodge nor yield. Gripping the short spear twisting with thunder and lightning, he explosively rushed over!

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

The thunder and lightning energy atop the spear tip collided with the green wing of light, resulting in the release of an extremely violent crackling of electricity.

“Cling clang!”

The short spear ripped through the green wing of light, directly hitting the axehead of the double bit axe in Feng Lun’s hands. As the grinding of metal released an extremely harsh sound, Qin Lie’s seemingly thin body surged forward and explosively collided directly into Feng Lun’s chest.

“Crack!”

An extremely crisp sound of bones breaking emanated out from Feng Lun's chest, his expression immediately becoming ugly.

The terrifying feeling of having been bombarded by a giant ship came to mind as his body soared through the air, drawing a parabola before explosively crashing to the ground.

"This..."

Ling Feng's eyes popped open, his mouth agape. He looked at Qin Lie as if he had seen a ghost in broad daylight, unable to fathom what had just happened.

Qin Lie, who was nearly half the size of Feng Lun, had, with an incredible impact, actually sent Feng Lun flying. How was this possible? How could such a skinny body hide this kind of power that was reminiscent of a primitive savage beast?

Without waiting for Ling Feng to react, Qin Lie's seemingly small body, with no hesitation whatsoever, struck at Feng Lun again like an extremely sharp sword!

At this moment, Feng Lun, with a mouth full of blood, couldn't even stand up. He could only fearfully and desperately crawl backwards...

"That first time by the campfire, I had wanted to kill you right then and there due to the cheapness of your mouth. Now I have

fulfilled my desire.”

Qin Lie lowly muttered one sentence and then immediately rushed forward again. A stone beneath his foot suddenly exploded as his body flew into the air. As if he were wielding the power of the lightning from the Ninth Heaven, he came crashing down.

“Pssh!”

Qin Lie viciously impaled Feng Jie’s short spear into Feng Lun’s chest, nailing him onto the ground.

If one suddenly glanced over, Feng Lun would seem to be a giant toad which had been nailed in place by a giant nail, his expression ugly and miserable.

“Gurg!”

Feng Lun’s mouth foamed with blood, his body twitching as the light in his eyes gradually faded.

“Zzzt!”

Also at this moment, an explosive, thunderous sound came from within the short spear. The spirit diagram within seemed damaged.

Surprised, Qin Lie went over and touched the short spear. He

discovered that the materials within the spear astonishingly had traces of being charred...

Heavenly Thunder Eradication circulated the energy of thunder and lightning. Not only did it use lightning, it also used thunder! Heavenly Thunder was too overbearing and violent, not something any materials of a spirit artifact could withstand.

Feng Jie's short spear was totally unable to withstand the extreme power of the thunder and lightning for long and had already turned into scrap metal in this short period of time.

"Too weak..."

Qin Lie shook his head as he quietly mumbled to himself. Then, he went to wrest the Green Wing Axe from Feng Lun's corpse.

Afterwards, he noticed the sounds of fierce combat around him come to a complete halt. Confused, he looked around at his surroundings and was instantly stunned.

At this moment the eyes of all the martial practitioners from both families were directed at him and they were filled to the brim with extreme terror; their faces shocked pale!

Their expressions were all full of terror and shock, as if they had suddenly discovered a demon!

"Was it him? Was it also him who killed Feng Jie?" Light rippled

in Ling Ying's beautiful eyes as she suddenly happily shouted, "Yay! I knew it was him!"

Ling Xin's face became complicated as he suddenly lowered his head. Others who also felt ashamed and embarrassed were also seemingly afraid to face Qin Lie and averted their gazes.

"This guy, you really did hide yourself really thoroughly! Even we, your own people, were fooled by you..." said Ling Feng, bitterly laughing with his face full of great emotion.

Ling Yushi's pretty face also beamed with a radiant and lustrous smile; the look in her eyes caused even Qin Lie's heart to speed up.

"It was you! It was actually you!" Feng Yi's handsome face unconsciously distorted, causing him to look extremely sinister at this moment. "I was wondering why the Ling Family would leave all of a sudden! There wasn't anyone who left the canyon recently, there was only you, who no one paid attention to. It must have been you who messed with us from the shadows!"

Qin Lie didn't immediately respond to Feng Yi. Instead, he looked at Ling Feng, Ling Ying, Ling Xin, and the others and astonishingly asked, "What are you guys blankly staring for? Feng Jie and Feng Lun have both died, what are you waiting for?"

He looked towards the remaining Feng Family members and then mimed slitting their throats towards Ling Feng and the rest, indicating that they should kill all of them.

Ling Feng immediately reacted, quietly letting out a sound of shame before hurriedly shouting, “Stop blanking out already, let’s quickly eliminate the Feng Family!”

Ling Ying, Ling Xin, and the rest roared in response, their morale suddenly soaring. Like fierce beasts, they charged at the Feng Family members, ready to kill them all.

The initially disadvantaged Ling Family now had an overwhelming advantage since Ling Feng’s opponent, Feng Lun had been annihilated along with Feng Jie. The situation had completely turned around.

“Retreat! Temporarily retreat! Wait till we regroup with Shattered Ice Manor before attempting to enact revenge!” Upon seeing the situation take a turn for the worse, Feng Yi didn’t dare say another word to Qin Lie, hurriedly calling for retreat.

As he shouted, his ice cold eyes gazed at Qin Lie. Not bothering to give Ling Yushi another glance, he turned around and withdrew.

“Kill them all! Every kill counts!”

Qin Lie gave instructions at the same time and immediately infused his violent energy into the Green Wing Axe. When the axe began to blaze with electricity, he fiercely threw it over.

“Boom!”

Under the hot sun, the sound of a thunderclap exploded out of nowhere. The axe rotated in the air, as though a crazed lightning dragon as it soared, on a direct collision course for Feng Yi's back.

Feng Yi's expression changed as he hastily tried to stabilize his stance. He swung the Rainbow Hilt Sword, forming five rainbows which were sent out to block the incoming axe.

"Bang bang bang bang bang!"

The five rainbows collapsed in succession upon collision, leaving Feng Yi with no other way to block the axe's fierce onslaught than receiving it with his Rainbow Hilt Sword. The moment the axe and sword collided, his entire body violently trembled and his long black hair suddenly became charred.

The violent, explosive thunder energy surged into the Rainbow Hilt Sword from the axe and then into Feng Yi's body, immediately wounding him.

A mouthful of blood suddenly rose up his throat, but he held it in, not spitting it out. Seeing Qin Lie rushing over with killing intent, Feng Yi, for the first time in his life, didn't dare to say a single word and hurriedly retreated.

Chapter 32: Dual Powers

With Feng Yi's retreat, there was no way to change the fact that the Feng Family had been defeated. Following Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and Ling Xin's exertion to kill, any Feng Family member who couldn't retreat quickly enough was slaughtered on the spot.

Qin Lie didn't continue fighting and instead walked over and picked up the Green Wing Axe. Feeling it for a moment, he discovered that the Green Wing Axe was not completely ruined yet and could still be used for a while longer. Because of that, he couldn't help but rejoice a little inside.

"Eighth level of Refinement's Feng Yi still wasn't particularly powerful. Head to head... it didn't feel like he was stronger than me."

Qin Lie pondered to himself, thinking back to the previous battle. As he circulated his energy to observe the state of his body, his eyes suddenly lit up a bit.

He discovered that as he circulated spirit energy, the spirit energy within his dantian's spirit sea would come surging out, following his muscles and veins as it converged towards his arms and then palms before discharging out of his fingers and entering into the spirit artifact.

However, this wasn't even his full strength!

As the spirit energy circulated, wisps of thunder and lightning

energy began to accumulate within his muscles, veins, flesh, bones, and even his organs. This was what caused his spirit energy to become violent and fierce, not only increasing the power of his spirit energy, but also allowing it to use the energy of thunder and lightning which in turn greatly increased his power!

He suddenly understood.

These last five years, he had constantly been tempering and refining his physique with the power of the lightning from the Ninth Heaven. However, the thunder and lightning energy that had surged into his body and ravaged through it hadn't completely disappeared. Instead, some had infused into his physique, becoming another source of power outside of his spirit energy!

During a fight against someone else, he could use this thunder and lightning energy to explosively enhance his fighting capabilities!

Currently, he was only at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. However, if he used this thunder and lightning energy during a fight, increasing his level of strength by one, then he could even fight head to head with Feng Yi and not feel disadvantaged.

Thus, assuming this was true, Feng Jie and Feng Lun who were at the same level as him were simply unable to defend against him.

"...So it was like this. Seems like not a single bit of my years of harsh, bitter tempering were a waste after all! Not only did

Heavenly Thunder Eradication greatly increase the strength of my body, it also allows me to use thunder and lightning energy. It is indeed violent and overbearing!”

Qin Lie silently thought to himself, the corners of his mouth gradually forming a joyful smile. Afterwards, he stopped circulating Heavenly Thunder Eradication and tried to control the spirit energy within his spirit sea again.

A relatively calmer spirit energy surged out of the spirit sea, flowing along the same path through to his palm and then into the Green Wing Axe.

“Swoosh!”

The Green Wing Axe suddenly released a misty green halo. Carefully examining it, Qin Lie immediately detected that there was no longer any thunder or lightning energy inside it.

Sure enough, when he didn’t circulate Heavenly Thunder Eradication, the spirit energy within his body was normal and wouldn’t destroy the structure of the spirit artifact.

“It’s another low grade spirit artifact. This simple “Spirit Gathering” diagram, it’s no different from the one inside the short spear...”

Relying on his mind energy to feel about, Qin Lie became disappointed yet again. He immediately withdrew his spirit

energy, hefting the axe as he walked back towards the Ling Family's people.

"Qin Lie!" Before Ling Yushi could even speak, Ling Ying had already shouted out, her small face overflowing with excitement and an inexplicable expression. "You are so bad, you actually tricked us for so long! Say, have you been acting the fool this entire time to watch us make fun of you?"

"I never would have thought that Qin Lie would actually be this strong!" Ling Xiao excitedly chimed in.

"You stinkin' brat!" Ling Feng walked over, and pounded his chest in jest. He was also full of happiness.

"This time... it is really thanks to you. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to avoid this," said Ling Yushi, her bright eyes shining.

"Ling Yang died," commented Ling Xin, solemnly. He was the only person who hadn't walked over, still standing in the back with his head bowed.

Qin Lie glanced at him from afar before silently walking over and quietly saying, "Then you better live well and kill all of the Feng Family members to avenge him."

Ling Xin fiercely raised his head, looking deep at Qin Lie. From within his tiger-like eyes, complex emotions flowed out. With a

profound tone, he said, “I, Ling Xin, owe you my life! In the future, I will definitely repay you!”

Surprised, Qin Lie shook his head, replying, “You don’t owe me anything. I killed Feng Jie for everyone’s sake, as well as for my own. Relying on my own power, I wouldn’t have been able to contend with the Feng Family at all. If not for you all, I would have died at their hands, with absolutely no way to live.”

“I owe you my life anyways!” stubbornly said Ling Xin.

“Including Feng Yi, a total of three Feng Family members escaped. When they find Shattered Ice Manor’s people, they will come to kill us again.” Qin Lie took a breath and then bitterly smiled, continuing, “So we are still in danger. Everyone, let’s not talk too much and get out of here before we say any more.”

Everyone nodded their heads to express their acknowledgement.

When he took command of escaping this time, whenever they encountered an area where spirit beasts might gather and had to decide whether or not they would avoid the area, no one questioned his decision.

The sky slowly darkened as Qin Lie and his party gathered within a valley filled with giant, towering shrubs.

The shrubs within the valley were even taller than them, providing them with natural camouflage. No matter how powerful

Shattered Ice Manor was, it was pretty much impossible for them to find them through discreet means.

"If all goes well, we will enter Frost Mist Mountain the day after tomorrow. Once we reach Frost Mist Mountain, we will be able to send word back to the Ling Family. Furthermore, martial practitioners of Nebula Pavilion can often be found moving around there. If we are lucky enough to encounter any, we might truly have dodged this disaster," explained Qin Lie while looking behind him and pointing at Frost Mist Mountain, which was partially hidden from view.

Everyone huddled together, each holding some dried meat to eat as they attentively listened to his words.

"Qin Lie, how are you so familiar with the Arctic Mountain Range? These few years you've been constantly holed up within Herb Mountain, so how can you understand the circumstances within the Arctic Mountain Range to such a degree?" smilingly asked Ling Feng as he drank some clean water.

It was clear from their eyes that everyone else was wondering this too.

"It was my grandpa who was rather familiar with the Arctic Mountain Range. He told me about some of it before..." Qin Lie hesitated for a moment, then continued, "Tonight will be the most difficult night. Everyone make sure you are well rested. In a bit, when we are mentally ready, we will continue rushing along our path through the night."

“Mn, everyone disperse.” Seeing that Qin Lie didn’t want to say anymore, Ling Feng let the matter rest with a smile and instructed everyone to go rest.

Everyone gradually dispersed, picking areas to sit down cross-legged and rest. Ling Ying was also extremely tired and thus didn’t continue pestering Qin Lie, causing him to secretly feel relieved.

“I truly need to thank you. If you weren’t here, Ling Ying and I… our fates would have been extremely tragic and the rest of them would have been massacred.” After everyone dispersed, Ling Yushi remained behind, her bright eyes shining. At this moment, she was somewhat afraid to look at Qin Lie and instead looked in Ling Ying’s direction. “That girl has become very curious towards you. I had thought that she would pester you till it was unbearable again, but it seems that she really is completely exhausted.”

“She does talk a little too much.” Qin Lie nodded in agreement. “I’ve become frightened of her questions. Her not coming over here relieves me greatly.”

Seeing the lingering fear on Qin Lie’s face, Ling Yushi couldn’t help but let out a laugh. After thinking for a moment, she gently asked, “I’ve paid attention to the expression within your eyes many times, and sometimes, they are truly blank. You haven’t always been acting the fool these five years, have you?”

“Mn, most of the time I am actually in that kind of dumb state, it is a kind of cultivation method. It was only recently that I truly

reawakened…” With the circumstances the way they were now, there was no need for him to hide certain things any longer, and so, he gave Ling Yushi a simple explanation.

“Last time, last time when I helped you bathe, you… what kind of state where you in?” shyly whispered Ling Yushi, her face turning slightly rosy as she suddenly lowered her head.

“You helped me bathe? When was that? I don’t quite remember, it must have been while I was cultivating.” Qin Lie’s heart beat faster as he quickly acted like he knew nothing.

Upon hearing him say that, Ling Yushi, whose heart was in a mess, concluded that his words were insincere, though she couldn’t quite grasp why she came to that conclusion. Even so, she felt like she was going to die of embarrassment and in a panic, with her face crimson red, she blurted out, “Th-then I will go and rest first…” Once she finished her sentence, she hurriedly walked far away from him with her head lowered.

Qin Lie rubbed his face, abruptly discovering that the skin on his face had become extremely thick. Watching the shyly blushing Ling Yushi in the distance, he secretly laughed to himself, finding it amusing and thinking: You are clearly older than me by two years, but your skin is still thinner than mine. This girl… she’s truly interesting.

“That rotten guy, is he speaking the truth or not? If it’s true, then that time… he already had a reaction?” On the other hand, Ling Yushi’s heart was still in turmoil unable to calm down even with her back to Qin Lie.

“Snap snap!”

After an hour, as the Ling Family members were still recovering, the sound of shrubs snapping suddenly emanated over.

The expressions of Ling Yushi, Ling Ying, and the others greatly changed. Then they hastily shouted for everyone to be careful and hide themselves. Everyone took out their weapons to be ready to fight at a moment’s notice.

No one dared to act rashly. They didn’t dare to flee either. Because as soon as they began running, it would immediately expose their position due to the snapping of shrubs.

They lowered their heads, hiding amongst the dense shrubs, not even daring to breathe. They hoped the people wouldn’t come closer towards them.

But the more afraid of something one was, the more likely it would come towards you. From the sounds of snapping shrubs, they could tell that the incoming people were drawing closer their way.

Ling Feng’s face became sullen, silently gesturing to everyone to be prepared to fight and to take initiative to ambush the incoming party so they could catch the enemy unaware.

Even Qin Lie clenched his Green Wing Axe with his solemnly eyes

staring in the direction that the sound came from, cursing their luck.

Suddenly, a bleeding person appeared before of them.

“Liu Yan!”

The Ling Family members became dazed for a moment as they also saw Gao Yu and two other Gao Family members behind Liu Yan, similarly bleeding from their bodies.

Upon realizing that these people were Liu Yan and the Gao Family members, Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and the others quickly burrowed out, shouting out greetings. They were pleasantly surprised.

Then, Qin Lie’s expression changed, cursing in his heart. If Liu Yan and the rest appeared, then those of Shattered Ice Manor had to be nearby as well. For them to meet with Liu Yan, there was no benefit at all. In fact, it made it more dangerous.

Conversely, upon seeing the Ling Family’s people, Liu Yan, Gao Yu, and the others saw hope, their eyes brightening up.

“Why would you guys be here?” softly exclaimed Liu Yan. He swept his gaze across the Ling Family’s people, then finally fixed upon Qin Lie’s body. He said with heavy sarcasm: “Qin Lie! Very good! Very good indeed!”

Gao Yu's expression was just as dark. He coldly looked at Qin Lie saying, "Not all of us died, are you disappointed?"

Qin Lie couldn't help but laugh wryly. He knew with Liu Yan and Gao Yu's insight, they had long since guessed that the person who had helped the Ling Family escape was him and had also seen through his intentions.

Chapter 33: Mind Invasion

Gao Yu's face turned dark and his eyes grew cold. Killing intent swirled around him as he advanced, step by step, towards Qin Lie.

Fresh blood dripped from his shoulder, his clothes were all ragged, and he looked severely miserable. He seemed to have suffered a ridiculous amount of hardship.

His fellow Gao Family martial practitioners also had blood smeared all over their bodies as though they had just gone through a grueling battle.

With only three of the original nine Gao Family members remaining, including Gao Yu, the casualty rate could only be described as a complete disaster. From that, it no wonder that his eyes turned red the instant he saw Qin Lie.

"Leaving us behind to attract their attacks while you take advantage of that time to escape, what a scheme!"

Gao Yu grit his teeth, and both his palms started to emit continuous streams of black fog that looked strange and mysterious; as though they were floating vengeful ghosts.

"What are you trying to do?!" Ling Xin roared, positioning himself in front of Qin Lie while glaring at Gao Yu. "It's your own problem if you didn't make it out! Had our First Miss not notified you at all, none of you would still be alive!"

“Screw off!”

Gao Yu waved both his hands, and balls of pitch black fog lunged towards Ling Xin with forms akin to the faces of ogres.

With only a cultivation level at the sixth level of the Refinement Realm, Ling Xin was simply unable to compete with the eighth leveled Gao Yu. As soon as he was engulfed in the pitch-black, a sinister chill could immediately be felt spreading through his entire body as though he were invaded by evil spirits. Terrifying illusions surfaced in Ling Xin’s mind, and his eyes were filled with horror as he screamed while retreating.

Qin Lie scrutinized Gao Yu and realized that his hands were adorned with a pair of identical rings that each had the face of a green ogre with long fangs engraved on them. Qin Lie immediately deduced that the balls of pitch black fog came from those Ogre-faced Rings.

Evidently, the two rings were an extremely rare kind of spirit artifact.

“Whoosh!” A pretty figure suddenly appeared standing firm in front of Qin Lie. Before he could react, Ling Yushi spoke sweetly, “Gao Yu! I was the one that made the decision. If you want to find someone to vent your anger on, come at me instead!”

“You?” Gao Yu sneered, his eyes full of skepticism. “With your personality, you couldn’t have made such a ruthless, vicious

decision if there wasn't someone else instigating you. The Ling Family would definitely not dare to sacrifice anyone from Nebula Pavilion so easily!"

Whilst talking, the two Ogre-faced Rings on Gao Yu's hands started to spew pitch-black, ink-like fog again, which curled upwards to the sky, coalescing into a chilling figure of an ogre's face and swiftly flew towards Ling Yushi.

A gust of ghastly cold air pervaded the vicinity, and the wails of ghosts could be faintly heard as though there were actually ghosts floating about in the darkness.

This scene truly shocked Ling Yushi, and she suffered a state similar to Ling Xin, witnessing many phantom images lunging towards her which caused her to knit her eyebrows in pain as she bitterly fought against the illusions within her head.

Gao Yu had come across the Ogre-faced Rings by chance, and they held some sort of sinister art formula. It was precisely by cultivating the spirit art within the rings that he was able to improve at such a tremendous pace, becoming more and more proficient in wielding them.

Until this day, Gao Yu and the entire Gao family had yet to determine the grade of this spirit artifact.

Regarding the ring, Gao Yu was gradually touching upon its capabilities. He discovered that he was compatible with this spirit art and was able to form the ogre-like Yin black fog which could

directly invade his opponents' mind, such that even those whose cultivation slightly surpassed his would find it hard to escape.

Ling Yushi was at the same cultivation level as him, hence, the moment she was invaded by the fog, she was trapped and could only struggle helplessly.

Gao Yu scoffed with a sneer and strode past Ling Xin and Ling Yushi, making his way towards Qin Lie and taunted, "Do you only know how to hide behind a woman?"

Seeing the situation take a turn for the worse, Ling Ying, along with Ling Feng and the rest, hurriedly moved to try to help Qin Lie.

Sadly, they were further away and didn't expect Ling Xin and Ling Yushi to not even be able to put up a fight. Therefore, they weren't able to get close enough to help in time.

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh!"

Wisps of pitch black fog emanated, gradually coalescing into ogre-faced specters which floated towards Qin Lie.

From the beginning, Liu Yan stood a short distance away and had yet to speak a single word to stop Gao Yu. He wanted to have Gao Yu teach them a lesson as he was simmering furiously from Qin Lie's schemes.

The chilling black fog permeated Qin Lie's body, and he turned icy cold as he faced the horrifying feeling that there were ghosts swirling around him, just waiting to pounce onto him.

At the same time, as though there was another source from elsewhere, an evil force sneakily bored into his mind...

Mind energy!

Qin Lie immediately understood, upon contact, that Ling Xin and Ling Yushi became dazed due to the invasion of that mind force.

That wisp of mind energy infiltrated him and congealed into countless illusions of vengeful demons that appeared in front of him, furiously rushing to kill him!

Those scenes were intimidating, and they severely shook his state of mind. Just like Ling Xin and Ling Yushi, he had to try very hard to withstand the invasion on his mind!

A breath of cooling air seemingly rippled out from the Soul Suppressing Orb between his eyebrows, instantly rousing him from the hallucination!

One moment he was struggling, and the next, he found that the foreign mind energy from within his mind had vanished without a trace; the illusions had been completely swept away.

Qin Lie's expression shook, and he immediately channeled

Heavenly Thunder Eradication, covering his entire body with the energy of thunder and lightning.

"Boom boom boom! Zzt zzt zzt!"

Roars of thunder and lightning rumbled, and the chilling pitch-black fog that had enshrouded him dispersed rapidly under the assault of his Heavenly Thunder Eradication. In the blink of an eye, the fog was eradicated.

Even Ling Yushi and Ling Xin nearby were both quickly released from the fog as he neared them.

"What happened?" Ling Xin jolted awake, blankly surveying his surroundings.

Ling Yushi kept quiet, her clear eyes revealing a hint of suspicion as she looked ahead.

Gao Yu's face paled considerably, and his eyes flashed in astonishment. He looked straight at Qin Lie and shouted, "You, you are actually... actually able to break my move?!"

"Young Master Gao! That's enough!" It was at this moment that Liu Yan finally walked over. He patted Gao Yu on the shoulder to calm him down and turned to look at Qin Lie in surprise. "Those who train in the power of lightning are rare. The power of lightning is the bane of all that is evil. Hence, for Young Master Gao's art formula to lose against you is certainly no injustice."

At his words, Gao Yu reacted as well, as his face turned increasingly unsightly.

The spirit art within his Orge-faced Rings had touched upon this point, indicating that the might of this “Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record” was peerless, sinister, and mysterious. As the cultivation realm increases, one could gather the wandering souls and tormented spirits to invade the enemy’s mind, destroying opponents both in body and mind. But this “Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record” also indicated, that the worst enemy possible for the user would be a martial practitioner who cultivates in the power of lightning.

Martial practitioners who cultivate in the power of lightning, just happened to be the direct bane of the “Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record”. The power of lightning specializes in exterminating wandering souls and tormented spirits. Therefore, it was best to not use the “Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record” to fight such an opponent, else it was just asking for trouble.

“Let bygone be bygones for now. I shall report to Nebula Pavilion upon my return for instructions from my superiors.” Liu Yan turned towards Ling Yushi and Qin Lie and spoke, “The matter at hand is more pressing, and everyone should pull their efforts together to deal with Shattered Ice Manor and the Feng Family pursuit. How about it, Ling Yushi?”

“The Ling family naturally obeys Nebula Pavilion’s arrangement.” Ling Yushi lightly nods her head and continued, “I hope that next time you can restrain the Gao Family sooner, in

case he acts up again."

Upon seeing that Gao Yu was going to blow up in anger again, Liu Yan hurriedly patted his shoulders to calm him down and quickly replied, "It's good that you are willing to accept my arrangement. We sped along through the forest, and our losses were extremely severe on the way. Those that were unlucky encountered spirit beasts several times, our several brothers had all been killed by spirit beasts. Rather, ones who died under the hands of Shattered Ice Manor were fewer..."

"Not just us, it is the same for Shattered Ice Manor as well. Seven or eight of their members all died under the spirit beast's assaults. There are many strong spirit beasts in this forest, and once accidentally encountered, it would be very difficult to get away unscathed."

He then paused to look deeply at the Ling Family before continuing on, "I am very curious, as to why you have only suffered one casualty. Could it be that you have only had a single encounter with a pack of spirit beasts?"

As they were escaping, Liu Yan and Gao Yu's company only had two members die by the hands of Shattered Ice Manor. The majority were all killed by the spirit beasts; therefore, compared to Shattered Ice Manor, the forest was a greater trouble. Upon seeing that the Ling Family's losses numbered so few, astonishment birthed from his heart, and he wished to learn the cause.

And then he noticed, that right after he asked, the expressions of the Ling Family members all turned weird.

“What happened?” Liu Yan asked again.

“I’m sorry. Previously... I was too rash, and wronged you.” Ling Xin eyed Qin Lie and lowered his head in apology.

“I am ashamed.”

“It was our foolishness.”

“Qin Lie, do not take it to heart, alright.”

The Ling Family members who previously ridiculed Qin Lie were all full of shame now as they finally realized through Liu Yan’s words that they were incredibly fortunate to have Qin Lie guiding them.

It was laughable that they were scolding him incessantly throughout the journey, accusing him of slowing them down, resulting in the Feng Family catching up to them. Thinking back, quite a few of them wanted to burrow into ground and hide in shame.

Qin Lie only smiled and didn’t say anything, sparing them from further awkwardness.

“It’s fine as long as everyone’s alright.” Ling Yushi consoled everyone, smiled plainly towards Liu Yan, and continued, “We

didn't meet any powerful spirit beasts. None of us were injured due to spirit beast packs. Our only clansman that died was due to the Feng Family. However, the Feng Family members we killed were far more, only letting Feng Yi to escape with two others…"

Towards the end of her words, Ling Yushi's bright eyes glanced at Qin Lie, her face written full of pride.

"Impossible!" Gao Yu shouted in disbelief.

"H-how is that possible!?" Liu Yan was similarly in disbelief. "The forest is so huge, and there are numerous large and strong spirit beasts gathered here. How could you take care of every aspect when hurrying through? Also, you said that you killed many from the Feng Family, how did you accomplish such a feat?"

As he finished his words, he discovered that every member of the Ling Family had involuntarily turned their gaze towards Qin Lie.

Liu Yan froze for half a beat, then understood and said while nodding his head, "Looks like young brother is even more miraculous than I imagined."

"Your spirit artifact seems to be broken." Qin Lie said, looking towards the a hexagonal shield in Liu Yan's hands.

The shield was bronze in color, shaped in a hexagon with six protruding corners. Every single corner sported a pointed edge that was as sharp as a sword's. The edges all had traces of blood on

them, revealing that they were obviously sharp weapons capable of attacking. As such, the hexagon shaped shield could be counted as a spirit artifact capable of both offense and defense.

However, on the surface of the hexagonal shield, the engraved strange pattern was as though a severed snake, disjointed and unable to connect together.

Furthermore, on the surface of the shield, there were several traces of caving in. From the looks of it, the spirit diagram within the hexagon shield had ought to be more or less wrecked.

“Mn, it broke during battle, and I can’t pour spirit energy into it anymore. It already can’t... be considered a spirit artifact anymore.” Liu Yan revealed a bitter expression and shook his head, sighing, “I’ve used it for a long time, it has become so familiar and comfortable. Changing a weapon now would be too uncomfortable, hence I plan to continue using it. Sigh, this Hexagonal Shield of mine is actually a Common Grade Five spirit artifact, you know. It really pains my heart that it broke...”

“Can I take a look?” After thinking a bit, Qin Lie suddenly asked.

Chapter 34: Have You All Gone Mad?

“You want to look at this Hexagonal Shield?” Liu Yan looked confused and asked quizzically, “The spirit diagram in this spirit artifact has already been destroyed. You can’t even pour spirit energy inside it anymore. What is there to look at?”

Liu Yan wasn’t the only one who looked confused. The entire Ling Family gave him a strange look as well. They did not understand his sudden interest in Liu Yan’s broken spirit artifact.

“Just curious,” Qin Lie indifferently said amidst doubtful looks.

Surprised, Liu Yan stared intently at Qin Lie’s youthful face before nodding indifferently; he then passed the one meter tall Hexagonal Shield over.

“It’s broken anyway, so you can look at it all you want. This shield… I exchanged two thousand contribution points for it. It took me three years to accumulate that much. And now, the shield broke, just like that; it hurts to even think about it.”

Under the crowd’s curious gaze, Qin Lie grabbed the Hexagonal Shield. In his hands, the shield felt incredibly heavy, and there was a strong and sturdy feel to it.

Setting it down, he began rubbing his fingers across the strange patterns on its surface, getting a feel for its textures. At the same time, he quietly released his spirit energy and a wisp of mind energy to probe the insides of the shield.

His mind energy slipped in, and the broken spirit diagram inside the shield appeared abruptly in his mind; it was a combined version of both the “Spirit Gathering” and “Amplification” diagram.

Compared to the “Spirit Gathering” and “Amplification” spirit diagrams inside the Soul Suppressing Orb, these two were much too simple and crude.

During the past few days he had been memorizing the “Amplification” spirit diagram inside the Soul Suppressing Orb whenever he took a break from cultivating.

Now, he had almost memorized the “Amplification” spirit diagram completely, so the moment he saw this simplistic version of the “Amplification” diagram, he immediately recognized it.

The two spirit diagrams took up a large amount of space inside the shield, and the “Amplification” diagram was embedded inside the “Spirit Gathering” one. On close examination, he could clearly see that only the “Spirit Gathering” spirit diagram was damaged...

Due to powerful attacks, some of its lines had been twisted into a clump which caused an obstruction where the spirit energy was supposed to flow through; that was why Liu Yan was unable to pour spirit energy into his shield.

If “Spirit Gathering” could not function, then it would not be able to conduct spirit energy and subsequently cause the embedded

“Amplification” spirit diagram to fail as well. That was how this spirit artifact had turned completely useless.

In his eyes, the two spirit diagrams inside the shield appeared to be incredibly simple. Although they were just a small part of the “Spirit Gathering” and “Amplification” in his memories, they were able to accomplish their respective functions. If he could untie the knots and sort out the kinks, then the “Spirit Gathering” spirit diagram would function as it was meant to, and the spirit artifact would become usable once more.

Qin Lie frowned slightly with a serious look as he rubbed his fingers across the shield’s surface, thinking quietly to himself.

Liu Yan and the rest looked as doubtful as ever. They just felt that his actions were very peculiar and that it didn’t look like he was examining the Hexagonal Shield seriously.

“Brother Liu, those Shattered Ice Manor guys are still tracking us. It may take them much longer to find us at night, but we still shouldn’t dally around for too long,” Gao Yu suddenly said with a cold expression and then concluded, “I think we should keep moving.”

Liu Yan nodded and replied, “Right, we really shouldn’t stay at one place for too long.”

“Please continue to lead the way, Qin Lie. We’ll be right behind you.” This time it was Ling Xin who took the initiative.

Deep in his own thoughts, his words pulled Qin Lie back to reality as he returned the Hexagonal Shield to Liu Yan and said, “Let’s go. We’ll leave this place and find a new safe location.”

“Why is he the one leading the way?” A Gao Family member asked in dissatisfaction.

“Because under his guidance, even though we took a longer route, we neither encountered packs of spirit beasts nor lost even a single man!”

There was shock in both Liu Yan and Gao Yu’s eyes the moment he said those words. They glanced at each other once before Liu Yan said, “Alright! We’ll follow Qin Lie!”

“Then let’s go.” Frowning, Qin Lie led at the front once more. Occasionally, he would take out a map from his chest, glance at it briefly, adjust their path, and then continue to lead on.

The Ling Family followed closely behind him. After giving their wounds a simple dressing, Liu Yan and Gao Yu caught up to him as well.

“This Qin Lie fellow is no ordinary person,” Liu Yan lowered his voice and said.

Gao Yu scowled and let out a hmph. He did not answer.

“Let’s put down our dissent with the Ling Family for the

moment. Our first priority right now is to get out of this alive," Liu Yan advised.

"I know what to do," Gao Yu responded impatiently.

Liu Yan nodded.

While hurrying onward, the shield's twisted "Spirit Gathering" spirit diagram would appear from time to time in his mind as Qin Lie quietly pondered about how he should go about fixing it.

It wasn't as if he held any good will towards Liu Yan, he was just curious to test out and see if he could make the two spirit diagrams he memorized work. He wanted to know if they would really be as useful as he had envisioned in his mind.

By doing this, his efforts to memorize them would not be in vain, and he would also be able to decide whether or not he should spend even more effort on the remaining two "Spirit Storage" and "Strengthening" spirit diagrams.

Four hours later.

At midnight, Qin Lie had led the crowd to an ancient-looking forestry as he said, "Let's rest here for a bit. You should also treat your wounds as well," he said while looking at Liu Yan and Gao Yu's people. At that moment, blood was seeping out of Liu Yan and Gao Yu's wounds.

Liu Yan and Gao Yu had no objections to that and both sat down at their chosen spots, took out some medicinal powder, and began skillfully smearing it on their wounds.

Throughout these four hours they had not run into a single spirit beast. This caused them to believe in the Ling Family's words, Qin Lie really did know how to avoid the spirit beast packs!

Qin Lie sneaked his way over to Liu Yan and gave it another thought before saying seriously, "I think I can try fixing your Hexagonal Shield. No guarantees though."

"Ah!" Liu Yan abruptly turned his head with shining eyes and a slight shiver around his shoulders before he inquired excitedly, "Are you serious? This isn't a joke?"

The Hexagonal Shield was ranked as a Common Grade Five spirit artifact, and it took him three years' worth of contribution points to obtain it. Moreover, it could be matched together with his spirit art to increase his strength. That was why he viewed it as his most treasured possession.

The fact that his shield broke had distressed him greatly, so how could Liu Yan not be excited when he heard that Qin Lie could fix his shield?

"I can't give any guarantees. All I can say is that I'll give it a try. It's possible that it'll break immediately during the process and become irreparable in the future."

Liu Yan's Hexagonal Shield was different from the short spear that was destroyed by his thunder and lightning energy before. The spear's body itself was destroyed by lightning, and he had absolutely no way to fix that. But since the only thing that was damaged in this Hexagonal Shield was the spirit diagram, he could at least give it a try.

On the other hand, he had never done this before and thus had absolutely no way to know if it would work. That was why he did not dare to guarantee its success.

"Qin Lie, don't be reckless. The Hexagonal Shield is a Common Grade Five spirit artifact. If became irreparable due to your tinkering, then it'll be..."

Ling Yushi had been paying attention to Qin Lie this entire time, so when she saw him going over to Liu Yan, she too quietly sneaked over.

She was shocked when she heard that he wanted to help fix Liu Yan's spirit artifact and immediately hurried over to warn him. She was terrified that if the shield became completely unusable, Liu Yan would hate him and thus affect his future.

"Uh, it was just a suggestion. There is the possibility that it might completely ruin this spirit artifact, so I guess we can... forget about this?"

Qin Lie also felt like backing down after listening to Ling Yushi. After all, he had never attempted this before, so he was not

confident in the slightest that it would work. He was actually quite afraid that he might break the spirit artifact completely.

"Clang!"

To their surprise, Liu Yan actually tossed the Hexagonal Shield beneath Qin Lie's feet and suddenly stood up. He stared deeply into Qin Lie's eyes and smiled bitterly. "Little brother, do not listen to your fiancée. If you think you can do it, then give it your best shot. There's no need to be afraid; I won't blame you for it even if you did break my shield. After all, our current situation is just too perilous, and there is even a chance that we might not make it out of this alive. Even if you are only ten percent confident that it will succeed, you should still give it a try. If you really do fix my spirit artifact, then my chances of survival will be greatly increased!"

"You can't be serious?" Ling Yushi stared at Liu Yan in surprise.

"Without being able to take in spirit energy, my Hexagonal Shield won't improve my combat capabilities in any way. If I encounter a Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioner of the same level, it wouldn't be easy for me to fight them," Liu Yan said helplessly with his hands spread upwards, "If there weren't a bunch of bastards chasing us relentlessly, then perhaps I wouldn't have taken the risk and instead have chosen to wait until we returned to the pavilion so I could get an Artificer to look at it. But right now... it's a question if we'll even make it back home. Do I look like I have any other choice?"

"Understood." Qin Lie sucked in a deep breath and crouched beside the Hexagonal Shield. Then, he said, "Find me some fire

crystals.”

“Here you go!” Liu Yan straight up passed over a bag stitched together with animal skin; there were at least tens of fire crystals inside the bag. Every single piece was as big as a fist, and they were all as red as crimson fireballs. To their surprise, these fire crystals were all of the highest quality!

“Qin Lie!” Ling Yushi exclaimed with slight anxiety. “Do you really want to do this? Just how confident are you? Even your grandfather can only repair spirit artifacts below Common Grade Five, and this Hexagonal Shield is a Grade Five item. Are… Are you sure you want to try this?”

“Your grandfather’s an Artificer?” Liu Yan looked startled, but his expectations had grown greater instead.

Qin Lie no longer answered. He picked up a flint and lit the fire crystals. When the spark hit three fire crystals, they abruptly burst into crimson flames, causing a sudden surge of heat.

In order to fix the spirit diagram inside a spirit artifact, the spirit artifact must first be annealed. By burning it at high temperatures with the fire crystal, it would be able to achieve this effect.

After the spirit artifact had softened enough, spirit energy would be poured inside so as to carefully unclog the spirit network inside the spirit diagram. Once the adjustments were complete, then the annealing could be stopped, and with that, the spirit artifact would be allowed to slowly cool back into normalcy. This process would

also allow the spirit patterns of the diagram inside the artifact to harden, thus achieving the objective of repairing a spirit artifact.

"What? Qin Lie is going to try to fix Liu Yan's spirit artifact? Am I hearing this correctly?"

"He also knows how to fix spirit artifacts? That can't be right; is this guy omnipotent or something?"

"Liu Yan's Hexagonal Shield is a Common Grade Five spirit artifact! Back then, not even Grandpa Qin Shan dared to attempt to fix a spirit artifact of this level. What are we going to do if he completely breaks the diagram inside? Has he gone mad?"

The moment they heard Qin Lie was going to fix the spirit artifact, every one of the Ling clansmen gathered over in shock while clamoring at each other.

When Gao Yu heard the noise, he too walked over in great shock. He stood beside Liu Yan and said coldly, "Big Brother Liu, what are you doing? You're going to let him screw with your Common Grade Five Hexagonal Shield? What the hell are you thinking?"

Chapter 35: Repairing A Spirit Artifact

Maybe it was because he was standing closer to the fire crystals, or maybe it was because of something else, but Liu Yan's forehead was now covered in sweat.

He watched as Qin Lie crouched on the ground and heated the Hexagonal Shield on top of the fire crystals until it was crimson red. He also felt an inexplicable tension beneath his heart, and even his fists were clenched tightly away from people's eyes.

"It's broken anyway, and there is also the chance that we might not make it out alive. Might as well let him give it a go, you know?" Liu Yan said with feigned calmness.

"You've also gone mad!" Gao Yu stared frostily at Qin Lie with a chilly expression. "Have you seen such a young Artificer before? Do you think that a fellow who could fix a Common Grade Five spirit artifact be this young? I don't understand why you took this risk at all; this is a two thousand contribution point spirit artifact, and you're letting a guy like him ruin it? How utterly ridiculous!"

Liu Yan could only smile bitterly upon hearing his words. He also thought that he had been too rash and could not help but feel a twinge of regret inside.

The growth of every artificer was a long and arduous path. In general, only powerful forces could afford to raise them.

Practicing Artifact Forging just used up too many spirit

materials, and a small force simply could not afford it at all. To raise an artificer, there needed to be complete dedication and devotion, accumulated time, and countless heaps of spirit materials...

The Ling Family obviously did not meet those requirements, and Qin Lie... was just too young.

No matter how you looked at it, it was impossible for Qin Lie to be an outstanding Artificer. No wonder Gao Yu thought that he had gone mad.

“All of you, please be quiet!”

Ling Yushi’s brows were slightly furrowed, her face bright red from the light of the crimson flames burning on the fire crystals. Listening to the noisy crowd around her, she could not help but yell at them because she was worried that they would distract Qin Lie from his task.

The crowd quieted in response. Countless pairs of eyes settled on Qin Lie’s back, and everyone of them had faces that spoke of their shock and amazement.

“Swoosh Swoosh Swoosh!”

The flames of the fire crystal were wild and fiery, and they heated the Hexagonal Shield until it was completely red. The turtle-shaped pattern occasionally glowed bright red under the

sweltering heat, and it looked incredibly beautiful.

"Zzt Zzt!"

Under watchful eyes, strings of pure white spirit energy seeped out of Qin Lie's right forefinger as he pointed it towards the turtle pattern on the shield from a distance. A beam of white spirit energy immediately stabbed the top of the shield's pattern.

There was a wisp of mind energy mixed inside the spirit energy, and in an instant, he had made a connection with the shield!

He didn't need to touch the artifact directly with his fingertip. With spirit and mind energy alone, he could clearly see the two spirit diagrams inside the shield.

The mind energy began to gradually spread out like a web until it covered the two spirit diagrams inside the shield and locked the twisted parts of the network in place.

Then, the spirit energy rushed out rapidly and gathered at the sections of the network where it was a clustered mess.

Qin Lie's closed his eyes abruptly, more focused than he had ever been before. Feeling the twisted section of the network with his consciousness, he began steadily increasing the input of spirit energy and controlled them to flow towards the critical areas.

He did not act hurriedly, and instead threw himself into feeling

the interior of the artifact and its invisible details...

The Hexagonal Shield was propped up with four pieces of stone as the fire crystals continued to burn it on the inside. Even the front part of the shield, that was used for defending, was slowly turning red.

Qin Lie pressed closely against the fire crystals and the shield, and the spirit energy on his forefinger was like a bright white graver resting on top of the turtle pattern.

While maintaining this posture, he began to sweat profusely until his clothes were entirely drenched, almost as if he had just been fished out of a pool.

Time slowly trickled by...

His consciousness gathered around the shield's components themselves; he didn't dare to relax for even an instant as he focused entirely on feeling the subtle changes of the components themselves!

Under the fire crystals' continuous heating, the solid components inside the shield were finally starting to soften, almost seeming like they were about to melt on the spot.

This is it!

As if the floodgates had suddenly opened, the long suppressed

spirit energy abruptly rushed towards the twisted spirit network!

Under the guidance of his mind energy, his spirit energy followed the routes he had already planned out in his mind. It split up and attacked from various different directions, instantly untangling the twisted spirit network!

“Whoosh!”

The clogged spirit diagram was now completely unblocked!

There was no longer anything to impede the spirit energy as it flowed through the spirit diagram at a rapid pace! They poured into the Amplification spirit diagram inside the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram, and through the Amplification spirit diagram, they were split into six different parts that charged into the six corners of the shield!

“Zzt Zzt Zzt Zzt Zzt Zzt!”

Six blades of silver light suddenly shot out from the six corners of the shield, causing a huge fright among the Ling Family members nearby as they scrambled backwards in surprise.

Liu Yan was busy wiping the hot sweat off his face, but the moment he saw the all too familiar six beams of light, his body shuddered and his eyes shone with unspeakable excitement. He yelled, “It worked! It worked! Qin Lie actually did it!”

Listening to his cries, everyone from the Ling Family were shocked to the core as they stared incredulously at Qin Lie.

"Heavens, he... he actually did it." Ling Yushi's eyes glittered brightly, and her lips curled into quite the pleasantly surprised smile. She didn't even know what to say anymore.

"You can put out the fire from the fire crystals now." Qin Lie melted down to the floor like a pile of rotten mud while reminding them in exhaustion, "Once the shield cools down, it should then be usable once more. I'm way too tired right now, so I'll be going to get some rest."

Never did he imagine that fixing a spirit artifact would expend so much spirit and mind energy. This was even harsher than cultivating Heavenly Thunder Eradication. It was barely more than a moment, and he almost already collapsed.

Not only had he used a lot of spirit energy, he almost lost too much mind energy to boot. The high amount of concentration also caused him to become overly tense, and there was that terrifying feeling that he might collapse at any time. This artifact forging experience was... too profound so to speak, and it was more tiring than any art formula or cultivating!

"I'll keep this brief. Please accept these spirit pills first and use it well so you can recover quickly." Liu Yan walked forward and turned over an entire bottle of Spirit Recovery Pills, then, towards Qin Lie with glittery eyes, he continued "...Everything that happened before is forgotten. I owe you a favor. If I make it out alive this time, then no matter what troubles the Ling Family may

face in the future, you can come looking for me. If I can help out, then I will definitely lend you a hand!”

“Thank you, Brother Liu!” Without waiting for Qin Lie to speak, Ling Yushi suddenly thanked him with a terrific smile, her beautiful face in high spirits.

She knew that Liu Yan held a considerable status inside Nebula Pavilion. Now that they had Liu Yan’s promise, not only would they no longer be held accountable for the matter where they snuck out of the canyon, they might even be able to acquire help through Liu Yan and have more confidence and certainty going up against Du Haitian.

“You should be thanking Qin Lie instead of me,” Liu Yan replied while smiling amiably. Then, he suddenly realized something and slapped his head. “Or maybe not. Haha, I almost forgot that the two of you are family.”

He teased in goodwill, causing Ling Yushi to blush a little and laugh once softly with pursed lips. Her beautiful eyes glanced at Qin Lie with rippling emotions.

The instant he accepted the Spirit Recovery Pills, he swallowed three without a second thought. At the moment, he had his eyes closed and was fully focused in recovering. It was as if he hadn’t heard their conversation at all.

“What are you all still standing there for? If you have time to waste, then start channeling your energy and recover already!”

Ling Yushi abruptly turned around, still smiling, and reprimanded the Ling Family with a glare.

It was only now that the Ling Family members, who had gathered over to watch Qin Lie repair the spirit artifact, seemed to have regained themselves from their shock. They stared at Qin Lie from left to right, and to left again, until finally, they looked away after a while and returned to their original positions to cultivate.

Gao Yu and his two family member's faces changed abruptly and kept quiet when they saw Qin Lie actually succeed in fixing the Hexagonal Shield.

When he heard Liu Yan and Ling Yushi's words, Gao Yu knew that Liu Yan was no longer going to hold the Ling Family responsible for selfishly leaving the canyon.

He felt a quiet anger brimming inside his heart. Coldly, without even bothering to talk with Liu Yan, Gao Yu silently trudged away with his clansmen.

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"This is the spot! They've been here before!" The Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioner who was skilled in tracking led the men towards the thicket Qin Lie and the others were resting in earlier. While narrowing his eyes, he suddenly laughed, "The Ling Family was here too, I think. Judging from the tracks… it appears that they've actually gotten together."

“Very good; we can now slaughter them all at once. This saves us a lot of energy.” Elder Yan Dewu from Shattered Ice Manor let out an odd laugh before shooting a glance at Feng Yi beside him. He said consolingly, “Don’t worry, Feng Yi. No one will slip through our grasp.”

The Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners at a side let out a gloating expression when they heard the Elder’s words. The strange looks on their faces when they looked towards the Feng trio was unmistakable.

Feng Yi had turned incredibly silent, and the bright smile that usually filled his face had been gone for a long time. The only thing left in his eyes were hatred and a desire to kill. “I will kill them all to appease my clansmen,” he answered in a faint tone.

“When the time comes, those two little girls of the Ling Family, well... I will take responsibility and hand them to you for three days. It’ll be fine as long as you show me their bodies three days later,” Yan Dewu chuckled.

Feng Yi nodded without a word and clenched his fist in silence: Qin Lie! Ling Yushi! Just you wait!

“We probably won’t catch up to them tonight. But if there are no surprises, we should find them tomorrow.” The old tracker furrowed his brows and said, “If we hadn’t happened to run into a pack of spirit beasts last time, Liu Yan and the rest would all be dead already. Our luck should be better this time.”

“Right, we shan’t waste time any longer.” Yan Dewu nodded and continued, “Let’s wrap this up soon so we can quickly get back to Celestial Wolf Mountain and mine some Fiery Solar Jade. If this drags on for too long and Nebula Pavilion realizes our intentions, then it won’t be an easy task to mine out the Fiery Solar Jade.”

……

Qin Lie slowly awakened from his cultivation.

As he opened his eyes, he realized that everyone else was all ready to go except for him. They were all looking at him, as if expecting him to lead the way again.

Not even Gao Yu was an exception, and he appeared to have been waiting for a while patiently. It was only when he saw him awaken that he hmphed and said, “If we don’t go now it’s going to be daylight.”

“If you’re in a hurry, you can always leave first, right?” Ling Xin poked fun at Gao Yu. “Though it would be bad if you accidentally broke into one of the spirit beast’s nesting grounds and died, even saving Shattered Ice Manor the trouble.”

Gao Yu grit his teeth but did not reply. His expression remained as cold as ever.

“Let’s go.” Qin Lie nodded and once again led the way.

The moment he circulated his spirit energy, Qin Lie's eyes abruptly turned bright. He could acutely sense that the spirit energy inside his dantian was a lot purer and more refined than before.

This surprised him, and as he proceeded to sense his mind energy, he found that he was completely refreshed.Even his mind energy had improved by a significant margin. He was overjoyed by the discovery.

"When I was fixing the spirit artifact, my focus had reached an unprecedented level, and my spirit, body and mind were all in their best condition. It is now obvious that the process of expending both spirit and mind energy to tune a spirit diagram is also a wondrous way of cultivation! By fixing the spirit artifact, both my spirit and mind energy were actually enhanced! It looks like... this may very well be an excellent method to cultivate!"

Qin Lie thought to himself and slowly revolved his energy. While spirit energy circulated around his body, he realized that there would be a tingling sense of pain whenever it passed through the acupoints in his body.

"When spirit energy passes into the meridians, one may unleash his power through the acupoints. This is the threshold of the eighth level of the Refinement Realm! This tingling sense of pain inside my acupoints... Am I about to reach the eighth level of the Refinement Realm?!"

For a while, Qin Lie thoroughly savored the feeling with an excited expression as his eyes filled with joy.

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Chapter 36: Silver Winged Demon Wolf

During a martial practitioner's cultivation, the first six levels of the Refinement Realm only required the accumulation of spirit energy to slowly temper the body; it was relatively simple and easy.

From the seventh level of Refinement Realm onward, the advancement threshold went up by a whole level of difficulty, each promotion being much harder than the last.

Generally, only extraordinarily talented practitioners, coupled with the usage of spirit stones, spirit materials, and bitter cultivating, could hope to breakthrough to the Natal Opening Realm before the age of twenty.

As of this year, Qin Lie was fifteen and was able to enter the seventh level of the Refinement Realm; his speed was extremely shocking.

At this moment, Qin Lie was feeling a tingling pain from his acupoints. He immediately realized that his bitter cultivation during the last half a year or so caused him to inch closer to breaking through the barrier to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm.

The human body had a total of seven hundred and twenty acupoints. As long as spirit energy can pass through the acupoints and be released, one would have been considered to have entered the eighth level of the Refinement Realm.

The eighth level of Refinement, was all about tempering the body's acupoints!

As long as one was able to find the trick and cause one acupoint to open up and exude spirit energy, opening the rest would become very easy.

The first step to advancing from the seventh level to the eighth was to cause an acupoint to contain spirit energy so that it could then emit the energy.

As soon as his acupoints were able to act as a channel for spirit energy, he would once again rise a level, truly stepping into the eighth level of Refinement!

He continued cultivating. His heart filled with joy as he slowly tried to agglomerate energy to assail his acupoint...

His spirit energy was like a stream, slowly circulating within him. He then condensed a strand of mind energy and perceived the path of the circulating spirit energy, faintly observing the spirit energy entering his muscles, veins, and acupoints.

He could feel each and every acupoint; however, there really were too many of them, and there was no way for him to identify each one.

He slowly gathered spirit energy and suddenly tried to force it

into an unknown acupoint in his chest.

"Zzzt zzzt zzzt! Boom!"

A weird electric crackling followed by the boom of thunder suddenly emanated out from that unknown acupoint, directly entering his mind.

The spirit energy that he had tried to force in couldn't penetrate into the acupoint whatsoever, as if it had been hindered by a barrier of thunder and lightning; it was firmly kept outside of the acupoint.

"Th-this is..."

The depths of his mind jolted. His eyes suddenly became blank and dull as he lurched from side to side, almost falling over during his forward advance.

"What's wrong? Is it because you are too tired? Should we rest here a bit longer?" softly asked Ling Yushi. Upon seeing his abnormal behavior, Ling Yushi, who was behind him, hurriedly caught him.

Shaking his head, Qin Lie stood up again, gesturing that he was ok.

Qin Lie quite enjoyed feeling the wonderful touch of her jade white hands. However, he knew that this was not the time for

messing around and said, “Just now, I was a little distracted. I will be more attentive from now on, I’m fine.” He reluctantly moved away from her, continuing to lead the way.

Liu Yan and the rest all stopped, suspiciously looking at the two. Once the two started moving again, they all closely followed behind.

“My entire body’s seven hundred and twenty acupoints have unexpectedly… unexpectedly already been occupied by the thunder and lightning energy. I was wondering where the thunder and lightning energy were coming from when I circulated my spirit energy through my muscles and veins. To think that it was hidden within my acupoints! If it’s like this, then I was already tempering my acupoints when I was cultivating Heavenly Thunder Eradication?”

Qin Lie was extremely confused; he was neither able to figure out if the thunder and lighting energy within his acupoints would affect his future cultivation, nor was he able to determine if this was something good or bad.

“It seems that I will need to find some time to carefully observe and analyze it. In order to breakthrough the eighth level of Refinement, my acupoints have to be able to emit spirit energy. Currently, the thunder and lightning energy have already occupied my acupoints, making it so that my spirit energy cannot enter them. I wonder if it will affect the refinement of my body as I try to enter the eighth level of Refinement…”

He didn’t dare to put these thoughts into practice as they were

traveling and finally returned his focus to leading the way.

They rushed home through the darkness. As the sky began to gradually brighten, everyone looked over into the distance, gradually becoming able to see a towering mountain peak piercing into the clouds.

“That’s Frost Mist Mountain!” said Liu Yan encouragingly as he wiped sweat off his brow. “Within Frost Mist Mountain, there are occasionally practitioners of Nebula Pavilion moving around. If we can chance upon a beast hunting squad, it will greatly increase our power! At the very least, we can go home through Frost Mist Mountain and won’t have to continue through the depths of the Arctic Mountain Range.”

Hearing his words, everyone quietly sighed in relief. They all felt as if they were finally able to see the dawning of hope.

“We need to make it past today first. It is going to be our hardest day, and only if we make it out of the forest alive will we reach Frost Mist Mountain,” said Gao Yu, pouring cold water on everyone.

As soon as he said those words, the smiles on everyone’s faces disappeared. Everyone knew that that was the truth, and it was not time for them to relax their vigilance yet.

They continued on their way.

Before long, the sun rose, and ray after ray of sunlight stubbornly made its way through the dense foliage, stabbing into the ground like spears.

"Stop!" suddenly shouted Liu Yan softly, his expression extremely solemn. "In front of us... there are many spirit beasts approaching! Not good, they're already here!"

Liu Yan was in the Natal Opening Realm. As he was more than a level over everyone else, the first one to feel any abnormalities would naturally be him.

"Didn't Qin Lie say that we weren't going to encounter any packs of spirit beasts?" asked someone from the Gao Family.

"It's not like spirit beasts are inanimate and will always stay in one place. The fact that we haven't met a single spirit beast this entire way so far is already a proclamation that Qin Lie hasn't led us astray." Liu Yan looked the man in the eye, continuing, "This is coincidental. When spirit beasts are active, it is impossible for anyone to correctly predict where they will appear."

"Big Brother Liu, can we avoid it?" anxiously asked Ling Yushi who knew deep within her heart just how terrifying packs of spirit beasts were.

Shaking his head, Liu Yan bitterly said, "We can't avoid them, they are already almost here. I hope... it isn't a pack of too high leveled spirit beasts. Otherwise, we are in some big trouble."

“Stay close to the trunks of big trees and form defensive formations. Get ready to engage with them,” coldly said Gao Yu, gnashing his teeth.

Everyone suddenly sobered up. No matter whether they were members of the Ling or Gao Family, they all hastily grouped together and formed into defensive formations, carefully preparing for the arrival of the spirit beast pack.

“I hope our luck isn’t too bad. We are so close to entering Frost Mist Mountain, nothing bad must happen,” quietly prayed Ling Ying.

Everyone was like her, all quietly praying and hoping that the approaching spirit beast pack was one of the lowest level spirit beasts.

“Roar!”

Suddenly, a giant, silver colored wolf with two wings on its back, which neared two meters long, appeared from within the forest in front of them.

“A Silver Winged Demon Wolf! It’s actually... it’s actually a Silver Winged Demon Wolf. It’s over!” moaned Ling Xin despairingly upon seeing the spirit beast that emerged, his expression turning into one of deep fear.

When the Silver Winged Demon Wolf appeared, the faces of

everyone became ashen, their eyes showing their extreme fear and uneasiness. They were all in despair like Ling Xin.

Silver Winged Demon Wolves loved to eat human flesh. Upon encountering humans, they would definitely not let them pass considering how much they especially relished fresh human flesh.

“We were almost out of the forest. For us to meet a Silver Winged Demon Wolf, do the heavens truly want to end us?” bitterly laughed Ling Feng.

“Ah, we are definitely dead this time. Silver Winged Demon Wolves almost never appear alone. We have no chance at all,” said Ling Xiao helplessly.

“We just barely escaped with our lives from the pursuit of Shattered Ice Manor. For us to be torn to pieces by a Silver Winged Demon Wolf, I’m really not willing! If I had known this would happen, then I would have fought against Shattered Ice Manor. Even if I had only killed one, it would have been worth it!” said a Gao Family member.

As they quietly despaired, one Silver Winged Demon Wolf after another slowly emerged. As more Silver Winged Demon Wolves appeared, their morale fell lower and lower as they became increasingly more terrified and fearful.

Silver Winged Demon Wolves were Rank Two Beasts, able to contend with Natal Opening Realm practitioners. Amongst the group, they only had one Natal Opening Realm practitioner, Liu

Yan, and he was at the early stage. If they had to fight one on one, perhaps none of them would be an opponent for a Silver Winged Demon Wolf.

And currently, a total of eleven Silver Winged Demon Wolves had appeared in front of them!

How could they not despair in such a situation?

Out of everyone here, the only person to not feel despair after seeing the Silver Winged Demon Wolves was Qin Lie!

Not only did he not feel despair, he secretly felt excited. Licking his lips, he stealthily extended his hand and touched the sculpture by his chest, secretly thinking: We encountered them so quickly. It's unfortunate, truly unfortunate that Shattered Ice Manor's people haven't caught up yet. Otherwise, this truly would have been perfect.

"Qin Lie..." At this moment, Ling Yushi suddenly neared him, standing side by side with him and deliberately grasping his left hand as she turned her head and apologetically, yet beautifully, smiled at him. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have called you along to Celestial Wolf Mountain. If you hadn't come, you wouldn't have had such troublesome encounters, and you wouldn't... die here with me."

A breeze swept over, blowing the hair on her forehead into a mess, causing her to seem even more like a damsel in distress. Her jade white hand clenched Qin Lie's, seemingly trying to better feel

Qin Lie's presence, to better feel the warmth coming from his palm. It seemed as if being this way had calmed her down in the face of her impending death.

"Dying here? That might not be certain..." Qin Lie quietly murmured to himself.

"What did you say?" Ling Yushi's slight smile became somber and sour. "It's all my fault, I just had to call you over, causing you to suffer through this disaster with me."

"I was the one who wanted to come with you," said Qin Lie, his expression aloof.

Hearing him put it that way, Ling Yushi felt warm in her heart, lightly smiling as she said, "Oh you... you're too gentle, caring, and you even know how to protect others. The day of our engagement, when we were holding hands... At that moment, I should've known that, but knowing that now shouldn't be considered late."

Qin Lie was surprised. Who knew that under what seemed like imminent death, Ling Yushi, who was usually strong, would actually reveal a sentimental, feminine side.

"Awooo!"

The loud howl of a wolf sounded, and eleven powerful Silver Winged Demon Wolves suddenly rushed over.

Their silver wings spread as they jumped, allowing them to glide through the air and greatly increasing their speed.

Upon seeing the shockingly fast pace of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, the people who had originally believed that there was still a sliver of hope to escape had it completely crushed to pieces.

Everyone, even Liu Yan, had looks of despair as they wrung their brains. However, they were still unable to think of ways to escape this disaster. They could only huddle together and support each other. To them, every moment they lived was another moment.

“I don’t want to watch the Silver Winged Demon Wolves tear me apart and devour my flesh. I’ve heard people say... Silver Winged Demon Wolves don’t eat the flesh of dead people.” A practitioner of the Gao Family emotionlessly raised the sharp knife in his hand, his eyes emotionless as he was about to cut his own throat to avoid being devoured alive.

“Please wait a moment before dying,” Qin Lie suddenly shouted in a deep tone.

Amidst the eyes of despair, fear, doubt, and surprise, Qin Lie walked to the front of the formation. Facing the attacking pack of Silver Winged Demon Wolves, he took out the wooden sculpture that his grandfather had given him, holding it high above him.

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Chapter 37: Sculpture

Qin Lie stood in the front of the formation and raised the wooden sculpture high up facing the eleven Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

“They should be stopping now…”

Qin Lie said silently in his heart and waited leisurely for the Silver Winged Demon Wolf pack to stop on their own.

According to his grandfather, the Silver Winged Demon Wolf could recognize the wooden sculpture. Once he displayed it, they would be able to escape from the Silver Winged Demon Wolves’ attack.

There was no reason for him to not believe in his grandfather, so he was completely confident, thinking that once the Silver Winged Demon Wolves saw the wooden sculpture, they would stop their assault.

“What is he doing? Feeding himself to the wolves? Does he think that after the Silver Winged Demon Wolves tear him apart, they will spare us?” That martial practitioner from the Gao Family who was going to commit suicide by cutting his own throat mumbled in a low voice. He felt completely baffled upon seeing Qin Lie’s actions.

“Qin Lie! What are you doing? Hurry and come back!” Ling Yushi was worried and unsettled. She yelled hastily, ignored the formation of the defensive circle, and walked towards him while

holding her Twin Heart Hoops.

"That wooden sculpture... must be some kind of strong spirit artifact, that has to be it." Liu Yan's was stunned, but he immediately reacted and said with certainty, "Qin Lie must have some sort of plan, let us see what kind of miracle he can bring about."

From when he met Qin Lie, he found that Qin Lie was filled with the scent of mystery and believed that the wooden sculpture that he confidently raised up in the air should be some kind of extremely powerful spirit artifact, one that could help everyone defend themselves from the Silver Winged Demon Wolves' attack.

"Wasn't Grandpa Qin Shan the one who carved the sculpture?" Ling Feng's face was filled with surprise as he asked, "What is going on? The wooden sculpture can hold back Silver Winged Demon Wolves? That can't be possible, right?"

Many people of the Ling Family felt the same way. The expression in their eyes were all strange, and they felt that Qin Lie's actions were a bit ridiculous.

"Uh... How come they didn't stop?" After a few seconds, seeing that the Silver Winged Demon Wolves didn't slow down at all, Qin Lie was stunned as well. "No way? It didn't work like Grandpa said it would at all! This is bad!"

Before, the Silver Winged Demon Wolves were quite far away from the group, but now, after their savage charge, they were

already close within reach!

The first demon wolf even charged directly at Qin Lie; the light in its eyes were incredibly fierce as it charged abruptly after a long howl.

An extremely fierce imposing aura emanated from the demon wolf's body. The silver light flickering from its wide wings gave people a feeling that they were as sharp as a sawtooth.

"Qin Lie! Stop daydreaming!"

Ling Yushi screamed and threw out the Twin Heart Hoops in her hands at the same time. It became a screen of light as it flew towards that fastest demon wolf to help Qin Lie block an attack.

"Awoo!"

That Silver Winged Demon Wolf howled fiercely, and its claws struck viciously onto the Twin Heart Hoops.

The Twin Heart Hoops collided into each other in a rattle of gold and iron and was immediately struck into the sky. The screen of light that was formed with spirit energy was also instantly shattered.

Ling Yushi's beautiful face paled, and without thinking any further, she moved to Qin Lie, stood in front of him, and, with her delicate hands, gathered spirit energy to defend against the

angered Silver Winged Demon Wolf.

She was helping Qin Lie block the lethal attack!

The sinister light shining in the eyes of the Silver Winged Demon Wolf was terrifying. It looked at Ling Yushi tauntingly as if it had intelligence as it flapped wide wings, swiftly bringing its majestic body high into the air, before diving towards Ling Yushi.

It seemed like the flesh and blood of a young tender woman was more delicious to it, so it gave up its other prey, Qin Lie.

“Hurry and leave!” Ling Yushi yelled hastily.

Qin Lie felt defeated that the wooden sculpture didn’t have the power that he thought it had and became stunned for a moment.

When he finally snapped back to reality, he found Ling Yushi swiftly making her move. She rushed before him, disregarding her own safety in order to try and block the Silver Winged Demon Wolf’s attack with her own life.

Ling Yushi was only at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm, and the Silver Winged Demon Wolf was a Rank Two Beast, which was the equivalent of a martial practitioner of the Natal Opening Realm. It was clear from the Twin Heart Hoops being flung away that she had no chance of going head to head with the Silver Winged Demon Wolf.

By the time Qin Lie realized it, Ling Yushi's delicate body was already about to be hit by the Silver Winged Demon Wolf. He didn't have time to grab and attack with his Green Wing Axe, so he wielded that wooden sculpture and attacked with it.

Circulating Heavenly Thunder Eradication, the thunder and lightning energy mixed within his spirit energy violently flowed into the wooden sculpture.

"BOOM!"

An unbelievable frantic power burst out from within the wooden sculpture!

The head of the wooden sculpture instantly shot out more than ten blue streaks of lightning that were as wide as fingers! Each lightning streak was like a horsetail whisk that was spread out and suddenly connected into a burning electric net, covering at least an area four meters before him!

"Clap clap clap! Boom boom boom!"

The lightning was shooting out intensely with the sound of thunder rumbling. The electric net that burst out from the head of the wooden sculpture exuded an intimidating and terrifying aura!

"Bang!"

The Silver Winged Demon Wolf showed fear in its eyes, but it

couldn’t hold its body back and crashed right into the electric net.

“Awoo!”

A shrill howl came from the Silver Winged Demon Wolf. Its silver hair immediately stood erect as it became burnt, and it fell down from the sky as it curled up its body as if it had been hit directly by lightning in the sky.

“Bzzt bzzt bzzt!”

The burning electric net that was formed from within the wooden sculpture released ferocious streaks and streaks of lightning. Each lightning streak released was tangled together like snakes, and its aura was extremely fierce!

“Clang clang!”

Ling Yushi didn’t even pick up her Twin Heart Hoops when they fell to the ground. She watched Qin Lie who shielded her and the scary electric net that was released by the wooden sculpture in Qin Lie’s hands. With her life saved from the gates of hell, all sorts of emotions surged within her heart.

“I knew it. If that kid wasn’t confident, why would he dare to rush out of the defensive formation?” Liu Yan nodded his head, looked deeply at Qin Lie, and said, “This guy was just as I thought. He is filled with secrets and wouldn’t be killed that easily.”

“Brother Liu is wise!” Ling Xin praised sincerely.

Liu Yan smiled slightly.

“Awoo!”

The Silver Winged Demon Wolf that fell on the ground was shrieking, and there were still thin electric currents flickering on his body. After it stood up, it backed away fearfully. Looking at the electric net that was released from the wooden sculpture in Qin Lie’s hands, it didn’t dare to attack again.

The Silver Winged Demon Wolves that were following behind saw it lose and stopped immediately. Each wolf stood behind each other in a line and were obviously showing fear as they all peeked at the area with the burning electric net.

Qin Lie was also stunned.

He held the sculpture in one of his hands by its legs and pointed its head at the pack of wolves. As he imbued his spirit and lightning energy into it, the life-like hair on the head of the sculpture kept releasing astonishing electric currents and spirit energy, forming a web of electricity and filling the area before him.

“This, this is actually a spirit artifact…”

He never thought that the sculpture that his grandfather had left him could be a spirit artifact, thus, he had never tested it by

inserting his spirit energy into it since the day he received it.

At the crucial moment just now, he didn't have the chance to think. When he held the sculpture and was prepared to attack that Silver Winged Demon Wolf with it, he naturally summoned all his strength in order to save Ling Yushi.

But he didn't expect the sculpture to give him such a big surprise!

Because he didn't think that the sculpture was a spirit artifact before, he didn't input mind energy into it and didn't examine the inner workings of the sculpture.

At this moment, seeing that the pack of Silver Winged Demon Wolves stop with surprised expressions, he kept inserting his spirit energy into the sculpture and also slipped some mind energy into it to sense its construction now that he was finally not pressed for time.

A trace of mind energy flow within and his face instantly sparkled brightly as he yelled within his heart, "What a miraculous Artifact Forging method!"

There were at least six different spirit diagrams inside the sculpture!

And it had all the four basic spirit diagrams, Spirit Gathering, Amplification, Spirit Storage, and Strengthening!

It was just that the four basic spirit diagrams within were much simpler when compared to the respective ones within his Soul Suppressing Orb. However, the ones within the sculpture were still several times more refined and complicated than the Spirit Gathering diagrams within the short spear, the Green Wing Axe, and the Hexagonal Shield!

The four basic spirit diagrams within the sculpture were detailed and complicated, but the structure was clear and the diagrams worked together perfectly.

Aside from the four basic spirit diagrams, there were two spirit diagrams that were even more complicated mounted within. Those two should be even more advanced and should be the real core of the sculpture!

Six different types of spirit diagram filled the sculpture. The network of spirit lines interweaved in and out; it was so complicated, just like the human body's tendons, and it stunned Qin Lie greatly!

Suddenly, he felt like the sculpture was a living being, because it seemed to have human-like muscles, veins, and flesh!

That spirit energy circulating within the Spirit Diagram, was just like arts unleashed by martial practitioners channeling spirit energy, wonderfully brilliant!

Qin Lie was still not a real artificer, but with his shallow knowledge of Artifact Forging, the spirit diagram within the

sculpture was definitely a creation of a Master Artificer!

This was the most complicated, mystical spirit diagram he had seen thus far!

The sculpture must also be an extremely unusual spirit artifact!

Compared to the wooden sculpture, the simple spirit diagrams within the short spear, the Green Wing Axe, and the Hexagonal Shield were like child's play compared to a master's creation. They were incomparable.

Because the spirit diagrams within the wooden sculpture were miraculous and unpredictable, after he inserted his powers into it, it intensified his power by several times, becoming so scary that even he himself thought it was unbelievable, and it caused the Silver Winged Demon Wolves to temporarily back off, not daring to continue their attack.

"Qin Lie! Come back here! Stop pouring all your spirit energy in!" Liu Yan suddenly reminded him.

"Mn, let's back off first. Don't continue wasting your strength."

Ling Yushi also said softly. Then, she hurriedly went to pick up the Twin Heart Hoops. Feeling the blue lightning electric net's fierce electric current, she was secretly shocked. She was sure that the power which formed the electric net definitely could not be formed by a martial practitioner in the Refinement Realm.

“What rank would this spirit artifact be?” She pondered in her heart, knowing that this sculpture greatly increased Qin Lie’s strength and unleashed power several times more than he was capable of.

Qin Lie came to his senses, nodded his head, and stopped inserting his spirit energy. After he stopped channeling his energy into the wooden sculpture, the electric net didn’t disappear immediately, it only slowly shrunk...

“There had already been stored spirit energy inside the sculpture!”

Qin Lie immediately found that there was a white, burning thing inside the Spirit Storage diagram inside the wooden sculpture.

That was the spirit energy that was already stored inside. The reason he was able to make the wooden sculpture release such deterrent power must be because he triggered that ball of white, burning spirit energy within the storage spirit diagram!

The spirit energy was stored within the wooden sculpture for many years, but after being released, it was still as fierce and ferocious, and it didn’t exhaust only after one use. This spirit energy... How thick and refined was it?

“Was it really Grandpa who inscribed such a magical spirit diagram and left this astonishing spirit energy? If it really was him, then how many things did Grandpa keep from me?” Qin Lie

was thoroughly shocked.

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Chapter 38: Heavy Encirclement

Together, Qin Lie and Ling Yushi returned to the defensive formation and began to fight alongside everyone.

“Zing zing zing zing zing zing!”

One sharp ray of silver light after another shot out of Liu Yan’s Hexagonal Shield, and the six beams rushed out, amalgamating into a defensive ring.

Ling Feng and Ling Yushi both took out their respective spirit artifacts, gathered spirit energy and infused it into them, also readying themselves to exhibit the power of their spirit artifacts.

Gao Yu’s cold expression looked towards the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, also inciting his Ogre-faced Rings.

Cluster after cluster of tormented spirits, in the form of ghostly faces, emerged in front of his body like black clouds, assailing people with coldness while also bringing along a heart wrenching wave of mind energy which turned into a layer of defense as well.

Qin Lie clenched the sculpture, pointing the head of it towards the pack of wolves. Amidst the crackling of electricity, the net of thunder and lightning gradually expanded out.

“Howl!”

The Silver Winged Demon Wolf that had previously been injured lowly howled, signaling for the pack of wolves to spread out and encircle the group of people.

“Everyone be careful! Silver Winged Demon Wolves have intelligence, they know how to attack weak spots. Do not let them break the formation!”

Liu Yan reminded everyone, his expression grim as he circulated his strength so that everyone could continue to hide within the formation. Only Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, Gao Yu, and himself were outside of it.

The others were armed with javelins, lances, bows, and other long ranged weapons. They huddled within the defensive circle, preparing for the moment when the Silver Winged Demon Wolves drew close enough so that they could coordinate with Qin Lie, Gao Yu, and the rest.

“They’re coming!”

Liu Yan grimly yelled and his Hexagonal Shield expelled six streaks of rainbow-colored rays, causing a powerful aura to emanate from him.

The eleven Silver Winged Demon Wolves surged over at the same time, attacking from all four directions; Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, Gao Yu, and Ling Feng all infused spirit energy into their spirit artifacts.

At this moment, the spirit artifacts all let out colorful, dazzling rays of light. These rays shined upon the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, causing their pupils to contract.

“Whoosh whoosh whoosh! Clap clap clap!”

At the same time, the formation of rainbow rays, the lightning net, the groups of fire clouds, the clusters of tormented spirits, and the curtain of silver light emanated great power, forming layer after layer of thick, defensive rings which welcomed the charging demon wolves.

Behind them, the others were either desperately shooting arrows or throwing javelins and spears towards the wolf pack.

“Awoooo!”

As the Silver Winged Demon Wolves powerfully howled, they charged at the defensive barrier composed by the spirit artifacts. Under the barrage of arrows and javelins, light reflected off of the wolves’ two meter long bodies and flickered in the sky, making it seem as if they were on fire.

Each arrow and spear could only leave shallow cuts on the wolves’ bodies and were unable to truly wound them.

Only the lightning net, sharp rays of light, and tormented wraiths, condensed by the respective spirit artifacts of Qin Lie, Liu Yan, and Gao Yu, were able to cause the wolves to cry out in pain

when they were hit, causing the wolves to avoid them in a panic.

Clearly, only the attacks of Liu Yan, Gao Yu, and Qin Lie could fatally wound the Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

The first wave of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves' attack was unable to break through the defensive barrier. Taking fire from the powerful spirit artifacts wielded by Qin Lie, Liu Yan, and Gao Yu, who were desperately infusing spirit energy into their artifacts, the wolves hurriedly retreated, temporarily leaving the three's attack range.

The first wave of offense ended extremely quickly, and thus they were only able to leave a few wounds on some of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves' bodies.

"Howl!"

The wolf which had exchanged blows with Qin Lie earlier suddenly growled, its fierce eyes staring at everyone as it circled them before surprisingly backing off bit by bit.

The rest of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves also strangely retreated, as if they were giving up on this special meal.

"No way?" Ling Xin dropped to the ground, his expression pale as he said, "I had thought that we would be torn to pieces. With our strength... there is no way to win, why did they leave?"

This same question formulated in everyone's mind.

For eleven Rank Two Silver Winged Demon Wolves, each with the power of a Natal Opening practitioner, killing them would not have been a hard task.

In the previous wave of attack, they had nearly broken through the defenses set up by Ling Yushi and Ling Feng, almost able to break through the barrier where they would have bitten and killed every member of the Ling and Gao families there.

"Maybe they decided that brother Liu, Gao Yu, and Qin Lie weren't easy opponents and were afraid of casualties, afraid that killing us required them to pay a certain cost. They... probably didn't want to make any sacrifices, didn't want any wolf to die, so they let us go," explained Ling Feng after thinking for a while.

Liu Yan, Ling Yushi, and the rest all slightly nodded their heads, believing that what Ling Feng had said was definitely possible.

"It's not!" Gao Yu looked over in the distance towards the direction the Silver Winged Demon Wolves left from, his heart beating rapidly. He continued, "When they attacked earlier, there was the sound of a wolf howling in the distance. If I didn't hear wrongly, they should have been summoned by the chief!"

After his remark, everyone's expressions became terrified. Ling Feng panickingly asked, "Could it be that there is another pack of wolves? If their leader is with another pack of wolves, then that pack is definitely even more terrifyingly powerful than this one!"

After believing that they had just weathered the storm, everyone once again fell into an uneasy fear as they looked in the direction that the Silver Winged Demon Wolves went.

Qin Lie looked at Gao Yu astonishedly. Pondering a moment, he bit the bullet and said, “Although I don’t want to irritate everyone, I still must say it. The howl in the distance... I heard it as well. I had originally thought I had heard wrong, but upon hearing Gao Yu say he heard it too, then I mustn’t have...”

Pausing a moment, he bitterly laughed and continued, “What Gao Yu said should be correct. There should be another pack of wolves in this forest with the leader, and they are definitely scarier than the ones we just encountered.”

Everyone’s faces became ashen.

Gao Yu frowned, giving Qin Lie a glance before snorting and muttering, “The Ling Family, I guess not all of them are trash...”

He said this very quietly. The Ling Family members, knowing that he had lost a lot of family members and was deeply resentful towards them right now, acted like they didn’t hear anything even if they had.

“What do we do now?” Ling Feng looked at Liu Yan.

Liu Yan’s expression was solemn for a moment. Then, he looked

at Gao Yu, and then Qin Lie, asking, “What do you two think we should do?”

Gao Yu and Qin Lie shouted at pretty much the same time. After they finished, both of them were startled, and immediately looked the other way.

“Then let’s run!” Liu Yan had no clue as to why the wolf pack leader had howled and didn’t hear it either. However, now that there was a glimmer of hope, he naturally didn’t dare to hesitate as he urged Qin Lie, “Lead the way, we will follow you!”

“Okay!”

Qin Lie didn’t bother saying any more. Taking a deep breath, he picked a new direction and quickly left with everyone.

Fifteen minutes later.

“Waaaaah!”

Shrill screams constantly emanated over from nearby; it was coming precisely from the direction they were heading to.

A male clad in the practitioner uniform of Shattered Ice Manor suddenly ran out from amidst the forest with his body covered in blood, his left arm missing, and his face full of terror.

A Silver Winged Demon Wolf opened its silver wings and soared through the sky as it fiercely attacked, biting his neck from behind.

“Snap!”

After the bite broke his neck, fresh blood spewed out from the wound like water. The man had been killed in front of their very eyes.

“So the other group of wolves encountered Shattered Ice Manor’s people…”

Needless to say, everyone now understood why the pack of wolves had suddenly withdrawn.

“It seems that although our luck cannot be considered good, at the very least… we didn’t encounter the pack with the leader,” dryly commented Ling Feng with eyes containing a profound bitterness upon seeing the brutal scene in front of him. Flesh and blood were splattered everywhere.

In front of them, the Silver Winged Demon Wolf tore the Shattered Ice Manor practitioner’s body to pieces. As it chewed up the bloody flesh, it howled, and from nearby, other howls came back.

This Silver Winged Demon Wolf seemed to have been a part of the leader’s pack as it thought that Qin Lie and his group belonged to Shattered Ice Manor. Its cold, cruel eyes flashed with the light of

excitement.

"This way! Withdraw this way! Eh? Are those people of Nebula Pavilion? Nebula Pavilion's people are over here!"

Another practitioner of Shattered Ice Manor emerged from the nearby forest. Upon seeing Qin Lie, Liu Yan, and the rest, they immediately screamed.

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh!"

The sound of clothes fluttering quickly came from all sides. Many of the Shattered Ice Manor practitioners, upon hearing the shouts, transmitted the information along and then began gathering towards Qin Lie, Liu Yan, and their group.

"F*ck your mother!" loudly swore Ling Xin towards those people as his eyes immediately turned red.

"Shit, this daddy's going to kill you!" The eyes of the other Gao Family practitioner also turned red. Cursing all eighteen generations, of their ancestors, he stomped and angrily rushed towards Shattered Ice Manor's practitioner.

The Shattered Ice Manor practitioner, upon locating Qin Lie's group, clearly wanted to lure the deathly Silver Winged Demon Wolves over so that they would have to fight against the attacks of the wolves together. He wanted to bury Qin Lie's group along with them. It was no wonder why Ling Xin and everyone else flew into

rage.

Sure enough, as those practitioners shouted to each other, they all tried to converge at the position of Qin Lie's group.

Feng Yi and another Feng Family member appeared in the crowd, also covered in blood as they moved towards the position of Qin Lie's group.

"Should we break out?" loudly shouted Ling Xin.

"The wolves are still howling within the forest. If we rush right into a pack of wolves, I'm afraid we will die even faster. As soon as we start running, our formation will also fall apart. We can't outrun them either. We'll only be bitten to death. Only if we keep our formation and hang on can we have a chance. We must not aimlessly run!" explosively yelled Liu Yan, trying to get everyone to remain calm as they quickly reformed the defensive formation.

Only, that Gao Family member had already impulsively left the area, trying to kill his way over to that Shattered Ice Manor practitioner.

"Shing!"

An icy cold crescent beam suddenly shot out from within the forest, instantly hitting him.

The Gao Family practitioner, who had shouted that he would kill

the instigator, now had a bloody hole in his chest. Before he had even reached the other person, he had unwillingly stopped breathing.

"You think you're strong enough to kill me?"

The Shattered Ice Manor practitioner who had shouted first spat at the corpse of the Gao Family member. Casually swinging the sword in his hand, he beheaded the dead practitioner, and his grin became even wider.

"Yan Qingsong! I'm going to cut you into ten thousand pieces!" Gao Yu let out a bestial howl, crazily rushing over, wanting to finely mince him.

"Hehe, you can come and try. Just like how I beheaded your clansman's head, I will behead yours as well." The young practitioner of Shattered Ice Manor, called Yan Qingsong, uncaringly said as he smiled strangely. Waving his hand at the people behind him, he said, "Bring everyone over and attract all of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves here. Shit, there's no reason for just us to die, how can we let them off so easily?"

As he waved and spoke, the nearby Shattered Ice Manor practitioners began to all move over.

Before long, even the Head Elder of Shattered Ice Manor, Yan Dewu, appeared along with his trusted subordinates.

He had also been injured with bloodstains around his chest. At the moment, his eyes were sinister. After arriving, he nodded towards Liu Yan, saying, “In order to kill you all, we have already spent a great amount. You can all die peacefully now.”

Upon seeing the appearance of Yan Dewu, Gao Yu, who nearly rushed over, quickly stopped. He ground his teeth, and no longer dared to continue forward.

“This time, we truly cannot escape,” bitterly laughed Liu Yan. Sighing deeply, he said, “We will either be killed by Shattered Ice Manor or get torn to pieces by the Silver Winged Demon Wolves. That being the case, let us try to kill a few more members of Shattered Ice Manor. In this situation, even if we all die, most of Shattered Ice Manor’s people will die as well because they will be chased down by the wolves. It’s worth it!”

Indeed, as soon as Liu Yan finished speaking, another loud howl came from the periphery.

When the wolf howled, Yan Dewu also became frightened.

Afterwards, the sound of the quick movements of Silver Winged Demon Wolves immediately rang out from all sides as one wolf after another gradually appeared from their surroundings.

These demon wolves were extremely disciplined. With the leader’s howl, they used their speed advantage to gradually scatter and encircle everyone within.

As of right now, Shattered Ice Manor's forces and Qin Lie's forces were face to face in their formations, and the two forces were in turn surrounded and being observed by the fierce and brutal Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

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Chapter 39: Demon Wolf King

The forces of Shattered Ice Manor and Qin Lie had all been completely encircled by the Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

Qin Lie's group and Shattered Ice Manor's practitioners were divided by a bit of distance, each group on one side. When they looked at each other, there were only cold glares.

"Yan Dewu is at the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm. Within Shattered Ice Manor, he is famous for being ruthless and sinister. The three Hall Masters under him are all brothers. Their names are Tang Mu, Tang Lin, and Tang Sen, and they were all at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm, experts at close quarter combat. It is rumored that... in the past, the three Tang brothers once killed a martial practitioner at the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm after joining hands."

After Shattered Ice Manor's people emerged, Liu Yan explained some stuff to Qin Lie and the Ling Family, "This Yan Qingsong fellow is the young manor lord of Shattered Ice Manor. He is the cousin of Yan Ziqian and has cultivated to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, and is only one step away from the Natal Opening Realm. His strength is also extremely terrifying..."

As Qin Lie listened to Liu Yan's explanations, he solemnly observed the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners as his eyebrows wrinkled together.

When he had first seen Shattered Ice Manor's group earlier, they

had around sixty people with them. After their extended chase, less than forty had appeared.

Of those who had died, most of them had died from spirit beast attacks. If there weren't any other variables, the Silver Winged Demon Wolves had killed the most of them.

The power of Shattered Ice Manor's forces was very great. They had experts such as Yan Dewu and the three Tang brothers, as well as Yan Qingsong and Feng Yi. It was no wonder that when fighting this force the leader of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves had needed to call for reinforcements.

Generally speaking, Rank Two spirit beasts were comparable in strength to Natal Opening Realm martial practitioners. However, if those Natal Opening Realm martial practitioners wielded powerful spirit artifacts, then the practitioners would be a notch above them...

From this perspective, Yan Dewu and the three Tang brothers should have each been more powerful than a single Silver Winged Demon Wolf.

Shattered Ice Manor had a disciplined training system. This group of martial practitioners lead by Yan Dewu were all of his trusted companions and acted in perfect harmony with one another. Their weapons were also of excellent quality. Due to their advantage in numbers, it wasn't completely hopeless for them to fight and win against the Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

Their chance was even better now due to the fact that they had found Qin Lie and the others and dragged them in to the fray which would divide the Silver Winged Demon Wolves' attacks.

Qin Lie's expression gradually became more and more profound as he secretly pondered and realized that there was very little hope for them to get out of this situation.

"Qingsong, well done!" After Yan Dewu arrived, he continued giving instructions, directing the Shattered Ice Manor practitioners to form a defensive formation. Nodding towards Yan Qingsong, he praised him and then continued, "With the help of Liu Yan's group, we will split the pressure. This time, it will be much easier."

"Elder Yan, what about Nebula Pavilion's forces over there?" asked Feng Yi.

Just from seeing Qin Lie and Ling Yushi, Feng Yi became somewhat unable to contain his inner resentment and wanted to rush over there to kill. He wanted to tortuously kill Qin Lie and viciously massacre the Ling Family, then ruthlessly ravage Ling Yushi's lower body and satisfy his impulses.

"Do not worry about Nebula Pavilion's forces," answered Yan Dewu, his expression cold. "They will help us divide the pressure from the Silver Winged Demon Wolves and make it so that we will deal with a few less. Be at ease, they will definitely all be bitten to death by the demon wolves. That, I am sure of."

“Hehe. Lord Wu’s foresight is still the clearest. Please instruct us on how to use those people,” complimented Yan Qingsong with a smile. “Liu Yan and his group only have around ten people. When I shouted for everyone to come over, I just wanted to drag them down into the water and force them to help us block the attacks of the demon wolves. It would be extremely unwise to kill them currently because we would be wasting our power.”

“Let us follow Qingsong’s plan,” said Yan Dewu. He didn’t bother looking at Feng Yi again as he turned towards the three Tang brothers. Nodding, he said, “Stay in this area and wait for the Silver Winged Demon Wolves to come at you. Hurry up and prepare. The wolf king should almost be here. Harden your mind and kill all of those damned demon wolves for me!”

“Understood!”

“Awooo!” A loud, vigorous howl emanated out from within the depths of the forest.

Upon hearing it, the pack of Silver Winged Demon Wolves surrounding the Shattered Ice Manor practitioners and Qin Lie’s group all howled towards the sky in response.

They licked their knife-like sharp teeth, a cruel, bloodthirsty aura emanating out from their eyes. They fiercely rushed forward from every direction, simultaneously attacking Shattered Ice Manor’s people as well as Qin Lie’s group; each wolf had a frightening demeanor.

“Let us first deal with the wolf pack!” Liu Yan quietly swore and then hurriedly stopped everyone, having them prepare the defensive formation to deal with the demon wolves’ attacks.

As he had been explaining Shattered Ice Manor’s major figures earlier, their own group had been slowly moving towards Shattered Ice Manor’s forces in formation, hoping for an opportunity to decisively strike them down.

From his point of view, their group was doomed to die here. It was either being torn to shreds by the wolf pack or being killed by Shattered Ice Manor.

That being the case, they might as well drag a few more Shattered Ice Manor enemies down with them before dying. This way, even if they died, it would be worth it.

But the Silver Winged Demon Wolves just struck too quickly!

Not waiting for the group to approach Shattered Ice Manor, the wolf pack unleashed a raging offensive, scaring Liu Yan and forcing him to give out new orders.

Everyone followed his orders, immediately stopping as Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and Gao Yu stepped forward, directly facing the attacks of the demon wolves as Ling Ying, Ling Xin, and the rest attacked from within the defensive ring.

“Whoosh whoosh whoosh!”

Three powerful male wolves spread out their silver wings, and a sinister light shined in their eyes as they glided over in the air.

“They’re coming!”

The hairs on Qin Lie’s body all stood up on end as he clenched the sculpture left behind by his grandpa. Taking a deep breath, he focused on the upcoming fight.

Cold beads of sweat appeared on everyone’s foreheads except for his. They too prepared themselves to go all out, risking their lives to try and buy more time.

“Charge!”

“Give it your all!”

“Shit, I’m not going to stand for this! I don’t want to die in a demon wolf’s mouth! I want to shatter Shattered Ice Manor!”

“I’m also not going to stand for this!”

From within the encirclement, several people shouted, and their eyes turned red as their demeanor became angry and crazed.

“Aooo!”

At this moment, an impelling howl suddenly came from within the nearby forest.

Upon hearing this howl, within the cruel, cold eyes of the three Silver Winged Demon Wolves who were getting ever so closer to Qin Lie's group, a sliver of confusion appeared.

It seemed as if their leader had issued an extremely strange order, causing them to feel surprised and confused at the same time.

"Eh? What happened?" asked Ling Feng, stunned.

Qin Lie also became dazed.

The three Silver Winged Demon Wolves which had been rushing over had suddenly changed direction, passing right by Qin Lie's group as they moved towards Shattered Ice Manor's people instead.

Even the demon wolves behind them changed their targets. All of them ignored Qin Lie's group and headed towards Shattered Ice Manor's people.

"Holy f*ck! I... I really saw ghosts this time!" moaned Ling Xin, collapsing exhaustedly to the ground.

"God, I haven't seen wrongly, right? My eyes haven't become

blind, right? Why would they let us go?" shrilly questioned Ling Xiao.

"What's going on?" puzzlingly whispered Liu Yan, his expression also becoming stunned after the demon wolves all changed their directions. His frayed nerves finally calmed down as he too dropped to the ground.

"Eh? How come they aren't attacking Nebula Pavilion's forces? Are those demon wolves blind? Could it be that they can't see the group of people right there?" A perplexed shout sounded from within Shattered Ice Manor's forces.

Over on Shattered Ice Manor's side, every one of them had all become completely astonished.

They looked in an extremely awkward manner in Qin Lie's direction, completely unable to comprehend what they were seeing. Even after all of their insidious calculating, they never had expected that the Silver Winged Demon Wolves would completely ignore Qin Lie's group.

——This was completely beyond reason!

"What happened? Just how exactly could this happen? Those demon wolves... why would they ignore us? When they were rushing at us just now, they were exuding killing intent and were clearly ready to kill us. I'm sure I didn't see wrongly," questioned Ling Yushi, her beautiful eyebrows crinkling as she tried to think of an explanation. She couldn't think of any reason that would

explain what had just happened.

"It was the howl of the demon wolves' leader!" suddenly exclaimed Gao Yu.

Everyone suddenly looked at him.

"The three forwardmost demon wolves only went past us because the leader issued new commands," said Gao Yu, his expression extremely perplexed. "Although I don't understand either, one thing is certain — the one that let us go was the demon wolves' leader!"

"Huh?" Everyone looked at each other as they became increasingly puzzled. They had no idea why the wolf king would rescind its attack on them.

It was just at this moment!

A strong, sturdy-looking, giant wolf majestically walked out from within the forest, its entire, three meter long body silvery white.

This giant wolf was clearly a full level higher as a pure energy fluctuated around its wings. It seemed that once it spread its wings, it would be able to fly around the world.

After its appearance, everyone was immediately certain that this was the leader, the wolf king of the pack of demon wolves!

After it appeared, it didn't look towards Shattered Ice Manor's area, seemingly not caring about them as they were already under attack. It instead moved towards Qin Lie's group.

"I'm... I'm afraid that the wolf king might... might be a terrifying Rank Three!"

Upon seeing the true appearance of the wolf king, Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Dewu couldn't help but swallow his saliva, incomprehensibly mumbling as a sliver of fear surfaced within his eyes.

From when Shattered Ice Manor had encountered the wolf pack all the way until now, the wolf king had yet to make an appearance, and thus, it was also the first time Yan Dewu had seen it.

Just glancing at it was enough to cause chills to run down Yan Dewu's spine. After slightly sensing it, he immediately guessed the true strength of the wolf king.

A Rank Three spirit beast was comparable in strength with a martial practitioner of the Manifestation Realm, powerful enough to squash the lives of anyone here!

Including Yan Dewu himself!

How could he not be terrified?

Only, when the giant, silvery white wolf appeared, it didn't pay any attention to him. In fact, it didn't even look towards Shattered Ice Manor's location. Instead, it walked straight towards Nebula Pavilion's group. This made Yan Dewu feel nervous, but it also gave birth to a wild thought: Why does it want to personally kill Nebula Pavilion's forces? Just how did they anger it for it to personally appear and attack?

"A terrifying Rank... Rank Three entity." Upon hearing Yan Dewu's cry, Liu Yan's face paled as he hopelessly said, "It seems like it is about to personally make a move! Shit, just how did we anger it?"

At this moment, all of the Ling and Gao Family members felt chills run through every part of their bodies. It was as if their blood had stopped circulating, as if they had been frozen solid by a bone biting chill.

Qin Lie grasped the wooden sculpture as he watched the Demon King casually pad over. Deeply looking into the wolf king's eyes, he suddenly had an extremely strange feeling: The wolf king was coming for him!

Indeed, after the wolf king came closer, it continued walking straight towards him!

From the wolf king's eyes, a look of complexity that highly intelligent creatures possessed leak out. It seemed to be sighing as if it was thinking of a distant memory...

It was only looking at the wooden sculpture in Qin Lie's hand!

Qin Shan's sculpture!

Qin Lie's body shook as if an electric current had shot through every cell in his body. At this moment, he finally understood!

He finally understood why those three demon wolves had suddenly stopped their attack, and he finally understood the true motive of the wolf king!

"Everyone, everyone don't move! All of you, don't move!"

Qin Lie felt as if his heart was about to burst out of his chest. He gasped for air as he tremblingly ordered everyone behind him to stay their ground while he himself walked forward from amongst them.

Under the extremely shocked gazes of everyone, Qin Lie moved towards the Silver Winged Demon Wolf King, and just like the last time, he held the sculpture high up above him.

The giant, silvery wolf finally walked over!

Under everyone's perplexed eyes, the extremely terrifying wolf king slightly crouched down. Opening its mouth, it stuck out its tongue and, both gently and carefully, licked the sculpture...

Everyone froze as if they had been turned to stone.

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Chapter 40: Looting The Spoils Of War

The silver Demon Wolf King stared reverently at Qin Shan's sculpture and licked it both gently and cautiously.

Qin Lie's eyes widened as he stared at the crouching Demon Wolf King, then at the sculpture in his hand. He finally realized that the one who recognized the sculpture wasn't just any ordinary Silver Winged Demon Wolf, but the king itself!

It was only now that his strained nerves had finally relaxed, and there was also that feeling that he had just narrowly escaped death.

Everyone else was completely pale. They stared stupidly at that terrifying demon wolf just a few feet away from them and felt that their brains had short-circuited. The scene that was unfolding before their very eyes only multiplied that shock tenfold.

"Ooo, ooo…"

The silver wolf king softly howled a few times in a low tone, and after giving the sculpture a slightly reluctant stare, it began to slowly retreat.

"Aooo!"

There was yet another loud and passionate howl in the distance. Finally, it turned its head completely and like a bolt of silver lightning, charged towards the direction of Shattered Ice Manor's

forces.

"Zing zing zing!"

Its silver wings spread wide, blades of dazzling white knives shot out rapidly from within and rained down upon Shattered Ice Manor's defensive ring.

"Bang bang bang!"

A series of exploding sounds echoed out in rapid succession. The white knives were energy made tangible, and it smashed Shattered Ice Manor's defensive line to near collapse.

Many Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were struck down by the white blades, their flesh rent and blood spilt as if they had been cut to ribbons!

Even Yan Dewu had fear showing in his eyes and chills flooding out of his heart, as he watched the beast joining into the fray, he said with urgency, "We can't stop them! Spread out and break through on your own accord! Make every life count!"

Every Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioner became shaken upon hearing those words, and they immediately dissolved their formation and ran away blindly like a bunch of homeless cur.

Before the Demon Wolf King's arrival, their defensive line was tight and orderly enough to defend against the demon wolves'

rush. There were no major casualties that would be any cause for concern.

But when this Rank Three Demon Wolf King officially joined into the battle, the entire situation changed. Its fighting power alone was enough to tear down the entire Shattered Ice Manor defensive line!

Even Yan Dewu, a middle stage Natal Opening Realm martial practitioner knew that there was no chance he could match up against the Demon Wolf King, and to blindly defend in this kind of situation would only lead towards a dead end. To split up and flee was the only way to have even a sliver of hope at surviving.

——His order was not wrong.

At this moment, the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were fleeing their separate ways as they were being hunted down by the Silver Winged Demon Wolves. A few of them were quickly bitten to death and shredded into pieces, and when their clothes were torn, a large number of Fire Crystals slipped out into the open.

The moment they saw those Fire Crystals, the Silver Winged Demon Wolves immediately become even more ferocious and hunted after the martial practitioners with greater madness and brutality than before.

“...The Fire Crystals. So that’s why the Silver Winged Demon Wolves attacked them so furiously.” There was a flash across Qin

Lie's mind, and he hastily lowered his voice and told Liu Yan, "If you have any Fire Crystals or Fiery Solar Jade on you, then make absolutely sure that they're hidden from view, especially from the Silver Winged Demon Wolves!"

"Huh? Why?" Liu Yan broke out of his reverie and questioned with a dazed look on his face. After a short pause, he said again, "The Fire Crystals on those Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were the product of our excavation. After we got out of Celestial Wolf Mountain, I distributed them to the Gao Family martial practitioners, and when they were killed, Shattered Ice Manor took everything..."

"That very Celestial Wolf Mountain is the Silver Winged Demon Wolf den." Qin Lie answered him.

Instantly, Liu Yan understood what he meant and looked towards Gao Yu hastily, signaling him to be very careful.

Gao Yu replied impatiently with a frown, "I'm not an idiot!"

"Qin Lie, why... why did the Demon Wolf King act that way towards grandfather Qin Shan's sculpture?" Ling Ying asked excitedly with her little face blushing red, "Your sculpture, what kind of mystery does it hold?"

Qin Lie's mouth twitched as he said indifferently, "I'm not too sure myself."

“Hmph! You’re so petty, refusing to say anything and holding us out like this!” Ling Ying curled her lips into a frown and exclaimed with a huff.

“Regardless, it is all thanks to Qin Lie that we managed to survive until now.” Liu Yan held up a bright smile and slapped Qin Lie on the shoulders. He said kindly, “Don’t you worry, I have seen all your efforts with these two eyes, and when we get back to the pavilion, I will report the matter without missing even a single word! Hehe, just Shattered Ice Manor’s casualties alone would net you a great service!”

The moment they heard his words, Ling Yushi and the rest of the Ling Family were all smiles and brimmed with excitement.

Gao Yu snorted once, appearing somewhat dissatisfied, but he too did not say anything.

“As of now the men from Shattered Ice Manor are fleeing in every direction. Judging from the current situation, there shouldn’t be… too many people who would survive this incident.” Qin Lie kept a close watch on the happenings of Shattered Ice Manor.

Currently, heeding their leader’s call, the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners everywhere were being hunted down by Silver Winged Demon Wolves.

The silver white wolf king itself was keeping a close eye on Yan Dewu, and it had already chased him deep into the forestry,

looking like it wouldn't stop until Yan Dewu was utterly destroyed.

Countless Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were being bitten or shredded to death one after another after their team had scattered; it was a gruesome scene.

Not a single Silver Winged Demon Wolf had touched Qin Lie's group because of the wolf king's orders earlier. They would even avoid them on purpose, and since Qin Lie wasn't sure how good the wolves were at differentiating between humans, he strongly cautioned the others not to spread out to hunt the remains of Shattered Ice Manor's group. This was to avoid the Silver Winged Demon Wolves mixing them up and accidentally treating them as prey.

So, they simply watched from the sidelines, with cold eyes, as the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor cried out horrifically before being bitten to death in a splatter of flesh and blood.

After being hunted and forced into a humiliating escape for such a long time, everyone was looking at these bastards dying tragically with faces full of satisfaction.

An hour later, there were no longer any Silver Winged Demon Wolves that could be seen around them. All that was left were twenty or so bloody corpses and Qin Lie's group.

"These Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners should have decent items on them." Liu Yan suddenly said with a light smile,

“It would also appear that the Silver Winged Demon Wolves won’t be returning for a while. So, you may all start searching, and if you come across anything good, there’s no need to surrender it to us. Just keep it to yourselves. I’ll pretend that I didn’t see anything.”

The moment he finished, the crowd cheered. They screamed and charged towards the bodies that they had chosen a long while ago, ignored even the gory scenery, and excitedly looted all they could.

The Silver Winged Demon Wolves were only interested in fresh meat and blood, so they were completely uninterested in the weapons, spirit pills, spirit materials, spirit stones, and such on the dead bodies. And since the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were all Yan Dewu’s subordinates, every one of them had at least some kind of cultivation material on their person. For nameless and small powers like the Ling and Gao Families, all this were incredibly attractive.

In the past, small forces like the Ling and Gao Families would at times be arranged by Nebula Pavilion to engage with the enemy.

However, they were not allowed to keep the spoils of war for themselves and had to submit them to Nebula Pavilion for review before they were distributed as rewards in accordance to credits, casualties, contributions, and so on.

A case like this one, where Nebula Pavilion kept to themselves completely and allowed the looters to keep all the spoils, was incredibly rare.

Therefore, not only had the males rushed out with wild joy, even Ling Yushi and Ling Ying had excitedly joined in looting without a care for the gory scene or the fact that they would get blood on themselves.

Out of the entire crowd, Gao Yu and Qin Lie were the only ones who did not move, simply continuing to stand beside Liu Yan.

“Qin Lie, why didn’t you join them?” Liu Yan could not help but ask in surprise.

Gao Yu was the young master of the Gao Family, and compared to the Ling Family, they were also much wealthier. Moreover, Gao Yu and his two sisters were also working at Nebula Pavilion, and they had accumulated quite the number of cultivation materials for him throughout the years. So it did not come as a surprise to Liu Yan that Gao Yu would not be interested in those items. But it didn’t make sense that Qin Lie would choose not to act as well.

Out of all of Nebula Pavilion’s subordinate forces, the Ling Family would be among the poorest and most miserly…

“Since everyone in the Ling Family had gone over, they should do just fine without me. After all, there is only one Gao family member who’s in the fray as well, so in the end, the majority of the benefits will still fall to the Ling Family,” Qin Lie said coolly while returning a smile. Then he requested solemnly, “Big Brother Liu, the Silver Winged Demon Wolf den is at Celestial Wolf Mountain, and every May or June they would enter the deeper parts of the Arctic Mountain Range to pay their respects to the Icestone Snow Wolf King before returning in July. If Nebula Pavilion absolutely

must obtain the Fiery Solar Jade, then I must request that they postpone it until next year, until after the wolves have left before excavating…”

The Silver Winged Demon Wolves did save their lives this time, and the way the Demon Wolf King stared at his grandfather’s sculpture convinced Qin Lie that it loved and respected his grandfather very much. Therefore, he did not wish to see these Silver Winged Demon Wolves killed one by one when Nebula Pavilion excavates the Fiery Solar Jade.

“They went to pay their respects to the Icestone Snow Wolf King?” Liu Yan’s face turned serious and he exclaimed in a low tone, “You are sure of this?”

Qin Lie nodded his head.

Liu Yan inhaled and with a deep frown and said, “I will report this to the higher ups. If it is really as you say, then… I think that Nebula Pavilion will have to give up on the excavation of the Fiery Solar Jade. Even if the wolves are gone during May and June, we will not go to Celestial Wolf Mountain any longer.”

“Why?” Gao Yu, who had been silent and cold-faced this whole time, could not help but ask.

“This pack of Silver Winged Demon Wolves alone would be a headache for Nebula Pavilion to deal with, and we will have to report this to Dark Asura Hall and borrow their power before we can continue the excavation safely. Of course, if we simply

excavate after they have left next year, then we won't need to go through Dark Asura Hall."

Liu Yan stopped at this point and turned quiet for a moment. Then, he finally shook his head and smiled bitterly, saying "But if these wolves are descendants of the Icestone Snow Wolf King, then... we may as well forget about it. Nebula Pavilion aside, I don't think even Dark Asura Hall can afford to offend it."

"The Icestone Snow Wolf King commands this much respect?" Gao Yu exclaimed.

Liu Yan nodded and replied helplessly, "I'm not sure about the exact situation either. At any rate, the higher ups had laid down orders that if we're going through the Arctic Mountain Range, we must circle around the ice mountains and glaciers in the deeper region. We are not to disturb those powerful spirit beasts from cultivating, and the Icestone Snow Wolf King is one of the most powerful of the lot!"

Liu Yan added after a moment's ponder, "As far as I know, the order was handed to us by Dark Asura Hall, but... not even they are the last line of command."

"Then who gave the orders?" This time even Qin Lie was surprised.

"Dark Asura Hall is just a Black Iron ranked power, and although it commands Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor, and other powers, even they... need to depend on someone else, just like how

we, the Nebula Pavilion, have to depend on them to cultivate and survive." Liu Yan's smile was bitter as he continued, "The forces that can command Dark Asura Hall, our levels are just too far apart. Those kind of forces are just... completely out of our reach. So we don't need to think too much about it. We simply have to follow the higher up's orders because only then will we be able to survive. Otherwise, a single mistake might cause us to be wiped out completely.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu listened quietly and felt a kind of shock and awe blooming inside their hearts, as their understanding of the world's hierarchy and its cruel laws had grown just a bit deeper.

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Chapter 41: An Accidental Meeting By The Pond

The Ling Family gathered around a blazing bonfire, merrily drinking some fine alcohol while devouring chunks of roasted meat.

—They had long since parted ways with Liu Yan and Gao Yu.

Back in the forest, due to the appearance of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, Shattered Ice Manor was soundly defeated and lost god knows how many men, whereas they easily exited the forest and entered Frost Mist Mountain without any further incidents.

The moment they reached Frost Mist Mountain, Qin Lie and his group parted ways with Liu Yan and Gao Yu. Gao Yu returned to the Gao family, whereas Liu Yan had to go to Nebula Pavilion to report on everything that had happened in Celestial Wolf Mountain. Ling Yushi and the others, however, were going home.

All three sides were headed along a different path.

“Brother Liu really is a pretty cool guy, eh? What a boon it is for us that he would ignore all that loot from Shattered Ice Manor! Haha, I got about ten Rank Three spirit stones and a few Spirit Recovering Pills. It’s such a shame though that I couldn’t get a spirit artifact.” Ling Xiao grinned as he ate his meat.

“Hmph! Those Shattered Ice Manor bastards were all killed by

the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, and Liu Yan had no part in it at all, so why would these spoils have anything to do with him? Of course he should not have the audacity to intervene!" Ling Xing scolded with a cold face. "If it wasn't for Qin Lie, the rest of them would have found it hard pressed to escape death. You have nothing to thank them for at all!"

"You're right. If it wasn't for Qin Lie, we would've long been dead," Ling Xiao also agreed with a sigh.

When the Ling Family first departed, Ling Xing and Ling Xiao were the two people who were the most opposed to Ling Yushi bringing Qin Lie along.

They just couldn't find it in themselves to accept Qin Lie, whom they believed might become a burden to the team, so they would constantly take shots at him along the way.

Ling Yushi had scolded them multiple times because of this matter, but without success, considering how their attitudes didn't change at all.

However, when they set off for the journey back home, the duo had become Qin Lie's greatest fans. One might say that their attitudes had done a complete one-eighty.

Qin Lie had won their respect and their heartfelt admiration with his own transformation.

None of this had escaped Ling Yushi's eyes as a smile touched her lips and her heart filled with joy.

"I'm full." Qin Lie nodded and stood up to his feet, wiping the oily corner of his mouth with his sleeves and smiled. "I'll go ahead and find a place to cultivate. Do ignore me, and please take your time with the drinks."

"You can't go until you finish this wineskin!" Ling Feng yelled while smiling and tossed over a wineskin.

"Ling Feng! Seriously, Qin Lie is only fifteen years old. Can you refrain from pouring him drinks all the time? Do you think he is an alcoholic like you guys are?" Ling Yushi rolled her eyes at Ling Feng, warmly looked at Qin Lie, and said softly, "Ignore them..."

"You sure are a protective one First Miss! Qin Lie aside, even you and Ling Ying have drunk quite a bit of alcohol, haven't you? Aren't you underestimating him too much?" Ling Feng laughed loudly and shot Qin Lie a slanted look while goading, "Am I right, Qin Lie?"

"Since Big Brother Ling has given the word, naturally I'll have to drink this," Qin Lie said helplessly. He could only pick up the wineskin and, with a "gulp," drink deeply while arching his head. His actions were both bold and unrestrained.

"Enough! They've already forced you to drink so much, so you aren't allowed to drink any further!" Ling Yushi's brows were slightly knitted together as she snatched the wineskin with her

jade-like hands, then glared at the rest of the crowd while exclaiming, “And you guys will stop forcing him to drink!”

“Of course we’ll stop after this one First Miss, but the leftover liquor… has to be finished,” Ling Xiao laughed strangely. “Of course, if there is someone who’s willing to finish it for him, we’re also fine with that, right guys?”

The crowd realized Ling Xiao’s intentions and laughed along while many nodded in agreement.

“I…” Beside Ling Feng, Ling Ying also got excited when she saw the commotion and was about to stand up with a smile.

“Fine! I’ll drink for him!”

Ling Yushi cut off Ling Ying’s words right away. With a small blush underneath Qin Lie’s surprised gaze, she cocked her head, put her lips to the mouth of the wineskin, and began taking small sips repeatedly; her posture was both elegant and attractive.

Everyone exploded into applause as their smiles turned more and more merry when they looked at Qin Lie and Yushi teasingly.

Ling Ying secretly regretted it on the inside when she saw that she was one step too slow, and she hmphed lightly with a dissatisfied pout.

As Qin Lie watched Ling Yushi drink the liquor that he had just

drunk without the slightest reservation at all, he felt the slightest ripple in his heart.. At this moment, he thought that she looked more and more beautiful and exuberated an aura of unspeakable attractiveness.

“Are you satisfied?” Finishing the rest of the liquor, with her cheeks completely red, Ling Yushi rolled her eyes at her clansmen and turned to speak to Qin Lie gently, “Just ignore these bastards and go. Do whatever you need to.”

Qin Lie nodded with a smile and left as advised towards a faraway pond.

Before long, he arrived at a large tree with crisscrossing roots and took out the tens of Fire Crystals Liu Yan had gifted him, the Green Wing Axe, and Qin Shan’s sculpture, pondering while rubbing the bottom of his chin.

“Fwoosh!”

Before long, he had lit up a Fire Crystal and the flames burned blazingly. The axe head of the low level Green Wing Axe was propped on top of the crimson flames.

After a long while, the axe head began to turn red, and Qin Lie reached out his right hand and pointed at its cheeks from afar.

His spirit energy seeped out, and his mind energy flowed within. He immediately made a connection with the Green Wing Axe, and

while he felt out the simplistic Spirit Gathering diagram inside the axe, he also paid close attention to the flow of mind energy, capturing even the tiniest changes of the spirit lines within...

Previously, after he used his all his power to help Liu Yan fix his Hexagonal Shield, both his mind and spirit energy were almost completely exhausted. When he recovered using the the Spirit Recovering Pill, he realized that both his mind and spirit energy had increased by a certain amount.

It was a memorable moment which was why he wanted to try it again and see if he could increase his power through repairing the Green Wing Axe.

“Only by improving my cultivating and breaking through can my mind energy increase steadily as well. Mind energy is the key to unlocking my sealed memories, and if I want to remember what happened before I was ten years old, I must continue to better myself and breakthrough to the next realm! What was I like before I was ten years old, who are my parents, and are they dead or still alive? I must have an answer to all of that!”

While Qin Lie was in quiet thought, he began conducting his spirit energy towards the twisted knot inside the axe’s spirit diagram, ready to fix it.

“Poof!”

While his thoughts were still in a jumble, he accidentally broke a tiny spirit thread. Then he saw the Spirit Gathering diagram

actually collapse immediately. The spirit network was completely tangled together, causing the spirit energy to become unbalanced which suddenly destroyed the Spirit Gathering diagram.

It all happened in an instant, and there was nothing he could do to save it. When he realized the problem, it was already too late.

Originally the Green Wing Axe's components were already damaged by his thunder, so even if he did fix the spirit diagram, it would not be able to unleash its full power. He didn't do it to fix the Green Wing Axe but rather to cultivate. The Green Wing Axe was completely useless now, but it was nothing to feel sorry about either. He simply treated it as a failed case of reparation.

"It appears that I cannot lose concentration for even an instant while I'm repairing a spirit artifact or drawing a spirit diagram. No matter how miniscule the mistake, it could cause the entire construction to collapse and destroy the spirit artifact as well," Qin Lie's thought deeply. At this point, he began congratulating himself for actually succeeding the first time when he assisted Liu Yan by fixing his spirit artifact.

Since the Green Wing Axe was broken, he then picked up Qin Shan's wooden sculpture. As he began probing about with his mind energy, he felt a surge of quiet surprise.

Previously, when the Silver Winged Demon Wolves had attacked them, he had injected an insane amount of thunder and lightning energy into the wooden sculpture. He had thought that its components might be damaged by the violent thunder and lightning energy...

The truth was different.

His probes revealed that, not only were the wooden sculpture's components not affected whatsoever, even the "artifact's" interior structures were perfectly intact!

He didn't know whether it was because the wooden sculpture was adaptive to the injection of lightning powers or that this "artifact" was of enough high rank and could thus endure the destructive powers of lightning. At any rate, the wooden sculpture had no problems whatsoever.

"If this wooden sculpture truly was made by Grandpa, then his artifact forging skills... must be unbelievably superb!"

After a moment's thought, Qin Lie realized that the current him still could not understand the complex spirit diagrams inside the sculpture and therefore did not dare to change anything on his own. He had no choice but to safely put away the sculpture once more.

He sat down, held his breath, focused his mind, and began channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, all while using Spirit Recovering Pills to gather spirit energy.

After an unknown amount of time, he gradually woke up from cultivation and looked up towards the pure white moon, frowning. "There is thunder and lightning energy inside my acupoints and my spirit energy couldn't get through it. In this case, wouldn't it

be impossible to cultivate the penetration of my acupoints and achieve the eighth level of Refinement?”

Eariler, he gathered spirit energy and tried to break through his acupoints only to find that every single one had thunder and lightning energy inside. All the thunder and lightning energy quickly formed a barrier that prevented the rush of spirit energy.

He had tried many acupoints and all of them returned the same result; spirit energy was completely blocked off.

This could be counted as the first barrier he had ever faced on his path of cultivation. He needed to break through this barrier if he wanted to ascend to a higher realm and push his power to new heights.

“Splash splash splash!”

It was at this moment that he suddenly heard the sound of water splashing in the pond beside him.

The huge tree Qin Lie was by was right beside the pond. In the first place, he was cultivating from behind the tree roots facing away from the pond, so he didn’t notice anything happening inside the pond at all. Now that he had heard something peculiar, he then poked his head out around the tree and gazed at the pond.

A single glance alone caused a great shudder, and Qin Lie felt all the blood in his body rush to his head.

Under the bright moonlight and inside the clear pond water was a white as cream naked body, whose beautiful back had just suddenly appeared right before his eyes!

That thin waist, that cloud-like hair hanging across her shoulders, those long, graceful legs, and those peach-like butt cheeks… Qin Lie saw everything. He lost his cool in an instant, and his eyes became hot. Even his breathing was gradually turning heavier and heavier.

“Ling Yushi!”

Qin Lie shouted in his heart. He only needed to look once at that slightly thin figure to know who the beautiful woman was.

Previously, Ling Yushi was bathing inside the pond. Once she finished washing her body and swam over from deeper part of the pond just now, she stood up with her back towards Qin Lie, and facing towards the center of the pond, she said, “I’m done washing, so I’ll be going back first. Take your time.”

“I’m almost done,” came Ling Ying’s voice from further inside the pond.

Startled, Qin Lie looked behind Ling Yushi towards the deeper part of the pond, and only then did he noticed Ling Ying’s little head on the surface of the water, glittering under the moonlight.

He immediately realized that the two girls must have come to the pond to bathe together after the bonfire had concluded. It's just that he didn't realize that they had come there because he was in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, and since he was behind the tree, Ling Yushi and Ling Ying also didn't notice him.

"Okay. Then I'll go up and change into my clothes," Ling Yushi casually replied. She then turned around and began walking over from the pond.

Qin Lie shuddered again as he dazedly watched Ling Yushi, who was facing directly towards him, with his mind completely blank.

Ling Yushi was completely oblivious to the fact that there was someone in the vicinity. She was busy wiping the water droplets off her body and her soaked long hair with a towel. Her full and round breasts, her perfectly flat stomach, that little bush right between her beautiful legs... Qin Lie could see everything!

She walked straight to the where their clothes were placed not too far away, and just as she picked up some silken undergarments and put it on, she heard the sound of a person gulping.

"Who is it?" Ling Yushi's expression turned as she exclaimed softly, and without a second thought, she dashed towards the origin of the sound like lightning.

It was only then that Qin Lie came to his senses behind the tree as he quickly bowed his head, but unfortunately, it was already too late...

“Whoosh!”

Ling Yushi’s beautiful eyes were filled with evil. She raised her hands, brimming with a silver light and a murderous charge, and was about to strike down the offender with all her might.

When she saw that the person behind the tree was actually Qin Lie, she suddenly froze and a cry escaped her lips. In an instant, her cheeks turned completely red with embarrassment, and although her shining left hand was still held high in the air she just couldn’t bring it down on Qin Lie.

“First Miss, are you talking to someone?” At this moment, Ling Ying’s voice also came over. “I’m also finished. I’m coming up right now.”

Hearing her words, Ling Yushi became dumbfounded for a moment, but she instantly realized that the moment Ling Ying climbed up, she would see her completely wet next to Qin Lie, and Qin Lie too… would see an equally naked Ling Ying.

To prevent Ling Ying from noticing them, in a rush, she grit her teeth and shrunk right behind the tree and pressed herself tightly against Qin Lie’s body. That beautiful face of hers looked almost red enough to drip blood.

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Chapter 42: Intimacy

“First Miss, where are you? I told you to wait a bit for me. Just where did you run off to?”

As Ling Ying whispered to herself, her clothes rustled as she put them on. She glanced back and forth and then muttered, “That’s weird. She was clearly just around here. How did she suddenly vanish?”

As she spoke, a light blue veil covered the top of her petite body. Her little head constantly shook as she scanned around for any trace of Ling Yushi.

In order to avoid being seen by Ling Ying, Qin Lie and Ling Yushi were standing behind a large tree, but it was only big enough to hide them if they huddled together. Unwittingly, the two plastered their bodies against each other...

Ling Yushi squirmed. At the moment, she was covered only by some thin silk undergarments, and her long hair was still dripping wet. Her undergarment was completely soaked through, causing the thin fabric to closely stick to her graceful body. Compared to being completely naked, this kind of vagueness was far more enticing and stimulating.

Qin Lie didn’t dare move, his body becoming very stiff as his breathing gradually heavied.

Ling Yushi’s extremely alluring naked body was seamlessly

plastered to him, allowing him to smell the delicate fragrance of orchids and feel the creaminess of her skin. He could sense her supple breasts and the acceleration of her heartbeat...

"Bathump! Bathump!"

As Ling Ying muttered to herself, the heartbeats of the two quickly sped up. They could both feel each other's temperatures rise and hear each other's breaths slowly begin to grow heavier.

Stuck within their alluring and thrilling moment, the two became unable to think, their minds completely blank as they pressed closer and closer together. They almost even forgot about the existence of Ling Ying.

After who knows how long had passed and after Ling Ying's mutterings had stopped, the two were still stuck in the same position, their breaths still becoming ever so heavier.

Qin Lie felt as if a ball of raging fire had been ignited within him, one which burned through him and clouded his judgement. He only wanted to tightly embrace that graceful body; perhaps this way he could slow down the raging fire within him.

Subconsciously, he tightly embraced the graceful body as he pleased...

His sturdy arms suddenly exerted force, abruptly hugging Ling Yushi tight and only continued to exert more and more force!

Feeling the supple breasts press against him, not only did the fire within him not slow down, it began to rage even more violently, burning him to the point that he wished to press Ling Yushi into his own body!

He, who was only fifteen years old, only knew how to cultivate. He had only cared about the accumulation of spirit energy and rising in power; never before had he fought such a battle. He was unfamiliar with everything else and thus had no idea how to put out the fire within him.

His actions were but the instinctive reactions of his body…

“Uu… you’re hurting me.”

Ling Yushi’s breaths sounded more and more haggard as Qin Lie hugged her tighter and tighter. She felt as if she would suffocate at any moment and quickly cried out as she forcefully pushed Qin Lie away.

The two were finally separated.

“I… I have constantly been cultivating here. I don’t know when you guys came here, but it wasn’t on purpose… I swear! I swear it wasn’t on purpose…”

As soon as they separated, Qin Lie immediately sobered up. Within the depths of his heart, he felt anxious and confused as he

stutteringly spoke, his demeanor showing hints of nervousness.

Ling Yushi's face had flushed red, and an enchanting yearning shined and rippled through her eyes. She lightly bit her lower lip, snorted softly, and then said, "You didn't peep on purpose, eh? You suddenly hugged someone so tightly... what else do you have to say for yourself?"

Qin Lie was silent. He just stood there, speechless.

Ling Yushi suddenly raised her head and charmingly rolled her eyes, quietly laughing, "You're acting like a fool..."

Her words stopped; not waiting for Qin Lie to clearly explain himself, she moved her long, beautiful legs and began walking towards their rest area. From her graceful and nimble steps, she seemed... to not truly be that angry.

Qin Lie watched her walk gradually but gracefully into the distance, his mind still recalling the wonderful events that he had just experienced. After a moment, he suddenly felt that the prospect of continuing to cultivate had become awfully dreary.

He just sat down, raising his head to look at the timelessly bright and clear moon with his heart still a mess. No matter what he did, he couldn't calm down.

The following two days, every time Qin Lie and Ling Yushi saw each other, they didn't dare look each other in the eye. It was as if

they had done something unspeakable and were afraid of being exposed.

In the eyes of the Ling Family members, Ling Yushi was still the compassionate First Miss. Whenever they rested on the way home, she would chat with them about what spoils they had gained from the trip and exchange cultivation tips.

Qin Lie was also the same as before, generally not active in engaging conversation with the Ling Family members. Even when they rested, he would often sit expressionlessly with his eyes vacant as if his soul had left through his acupoints...

Through Ling Yushi's explanations, everyone now knew that Qin Lie's blankness was caused by his cultivation method and gradually became accustomed to it. In fact, every time they saw Qin Lie's eyes go blank, they would reveal looks of deep respect.

Everyone completely approved of Qin Lie's painstaking cultivation. Furthermore, as soon as they saw Qin Lie's eyes become blank, they began to gradually talk less and less. Immediately stopping their conversations and finding suitable places for them to gather spirit energy as well in order to temper their own bodies.

——Qin Lie bitterly cultivating had caused them to feel the pressure and had indirectly encouraged and inspired them.

"We will arrive home in just two more days!" That evening, as everyone sat together while eating dried meat and drinking good

liquor, Ling Xiao became exuberant as he laughingly said, “This time, Shattered Ice Manor has suffered great losses. We can be considered to have made great contributions and also gained a lot of spoils from the battle. It is truly a perfect scenario!”

“I wonder if Feng Yi died. If that brat didn’t die, sooner or later he will become a disaster. If he is still among the living, I will personally kill him myself!” coldly exclaimed Ling Xin.

Out of the Ling Family members who had left on the trip, only Ling Yang wasn’t returning. He had died at the hands of the Feng Family. Ling Yang was Ling Xin’s younger cousin, and this caused his hatred for the Feng Family to embed itself deep within his bones.

“The Feng Family is located rather close to Nebula Pavilion while the Ling and Gao Families are both rather far. Furthermore, since we are going through Frost Mist Mountain, our trip was extended even further... If Feng Yi didn’t die and went straight towards home from Celestial Wolf Mountain, he will have been much faster than us. If he wanted to play tricks, he could have already gone to Nebula Pavilion and discredited us,” reasoned Ling Feng with a solemn expression.

“Discredit us?” blankly asked Ling Xiao. “We have Liu Yan with us, how could he discredit us? Moreover, the Gao Family can also testify, how could the Feng Family change the entire story?”

“If he wants to discredit us, it is probable that he will include Liu Yan and the Gao Family as well. Although this can’t be covered up for too long, I believe it is likely...” said Ling Feng.

“What will he say?” curiously asked Ling Xin.

“The Feng Family wants time. Previously the Feng Family had already dispatched someone, so that person should have already notified the Feng Family Patriarch which means that they will have thoroughly prepared. After they’ve thrown suspicion onto the Ling and Gao Families, distracting Nebula Pavilion, they will immediately shift their allegiance to Shattered Ice Manor and leave Nebula Pavilion,” inserted Ling Yushi as she crinkled her eyebrows.

“What First Miss said is correct,” said Ling Feng, nodding his head. “After the Feng Family have passed the message on to Shattered Ice Manor, they will have already started their preparations. They will definitely all move to Shattered Ice Manor’s territory. There is no possibility that they will wait for Nebula Pavilion to slaughter them all. Before Liu Yan is able to return to give his own report on the events that concluded, the Feng Family would have already made thorough preparations…”

“What are you afraid of? When water subsides, rocks will always emerge. Future matters will just be headaches for Nebula Pavilion,” responded Ling Xin.

“Within Nebula Pavilion, there is an anxious person who has constantly been trying to take control of the Ling Family. After this matter, they might take this opportunity to make trouble before the truth comes to light,” said Ling Feng, sighing as he looked at Ling Yushi with a worried expression.

As he said that, Ling Yushi's pretty face also sank. Upon thinking about Du Haitian, Du Jiaolan, and her children, she began to gush with hatred as she knew that Ling Feng's fears could quite possibly happen. Du Haitian had long since wanted to deal with the Ling Family. If he was given such an opportunity, how could he not take it?

"From tomorrow onward, let us all increase our speed. We must quickly return to Ling Town!" suddenly shouted Ling Yushi after thinking for a moment.

Once everyone remembered the existence of Du Haitian, their hearts all sank. All of them silently nodding in understanding.

"Qin Lie is cultivating again, what a weirdo!" quietly shouted Ling Xiao.

Everyone looked towards Qin Lie and discovered that he once again seemed to be soulless. Feeling the pressure, they hurriedly ended their conversations and found their own places to cultivate.

Only Ling Yushi was still where she originally was. She seemingly sat in a trance as if she hadn't realized that everyone else had dispersed. It was like she had thought of some depressing matter as a touch of sadness emerged upon her elegant face...

"What's wrong?"

Qin Lie awakened from his state of Thoughtless Tranquility.

Seeing that there was no one nearby except for Ling Yushi, he watched as her eyes reddened and became moist. Suddenly feeling a little pain in his heart, he couldn't help but softly ask.

"It's nothing," sadly whispered Ling Yushi, wiping the tears from her eyes as she smiled at him. "I only thought of my mother..."

A sentimental light appeared within Qin Lie's eyes.

"My mother was driven to death by Du Haitian," depressingly whispered Ling Yushi as she hung her head. "That year, I was ten years old. At the time, Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor had gotten into major conflicts that were much worse than it is right now. At that time, Nebula Pavilion passed down an order to the Ling Family, commanding us to destroy one of Shattered Ice Manor's spirit herb garden. They had said that there weren't any Shattered Ice Manor experts guarding it..."

Once her speech reached this point, she once again seemed on the verge of crying. "So my mother and father, along with some of the family members, went out. Upon reaching the spirit herb garden, they discovered that there was a middle stage Natal Opening martial practitioner stationed within. At that time, my father was still only at the early stage Natal Opening Realm. Thus, more than half of the family members that went died, and as for my mother... she also wasn't able to come back."

She raised her head, her bright eyes filled with a deep-seated hatred. Grinding her teeth, she said, "Only afterwards did we learn that the order was sent down by Du Haitian and that he had purposely sent us there even though he knew about the true

situation within the herb garden!”

Qin Lie stayed silent for a moment, then whispered, “You must live well then, so that in the future, you can take revenge for your mother. You can definitely do it!

After saying these words to console Ling Yushi, for a reason he didn’t understand, a dull pain suddenly arose in his heart. His face became extremely pale as he clutched at it as a painful expression appeared within his eyes.

“Qin Lie, what’s wrong? Are you not feeling well?” nervously asked Ling Yushi, with traces of tears still left on her face. Upon seeing Qin Lie’s condition, she became shocked and hurried to his side.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” Qin Lie’s face became extremely red. Panting, he shook his head as he slowly took a few deep breaths. Only after a while did he stabilize himself. Finally, after breathing in another breath, he said, “I don’t understand why, but when I hear you talk about what happened to your mother, I felt extremely upset. I felt as if my heart was about to be torn from the pain.”

“Qin Lie, thank you, truly thank you!” Upon hearing Qin Lie’s words, she felt moved to tears, unexpectedly flying into his arms and tightly hugging him. She excitedly said, “Thank you so much for comforting me, I feel much better.”

Qin Lie’s body was slightly stiff, letting her hug him tightly

without any resistance. Yet this time, his thoughts did not become adventurous and his expression was unnaturally calm.

His response just now wasn't said to comfort Ling Yushi, but was the truest, deepest, most intimate feeling within his heart. Even at this moment, his heart was still aching.

"Mother, father, I have already forgotten you both. I don't know what happened in the past, but because I thought of you two... my heart aches," quietly whispered Qin Lie as he hugged Ling Yushi. Before he knew it, his eyes had also become slightly moist.

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Chapter 43: Returning To The Mountain

Eight days later, Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, and the rest, finally arrived at Herb Mountain. Seeing the familiar caves dotted across Herb Mountain, everyone was filled with joy.

"We have finally returned home," laughingly said Ling Xiao. Touching the bulging cloth bag on his body, his eyes flashed with light as he said, "Although it hasn't even been a month since I left Ling Town, this trip was just too dangerous and thrilling. It feels as if a long time has passed. Fortunately... we were able to avoid great disaster and instead gained great rewards, haha!"

"For us to survive through the sinister plot of the Feng Family and Shattered Ice Manor and their wild goose chase is indeed a miracle," said Ling Feng, looking deeply at Qin Lie. Smiling, he continued, "We were even able to gain a decent number of both spirit stones and spirit materials and were able to make contributions towards Nebula Pavilion as well. Mn, this recent chain of events was indeed quite the thrill ride."

Everyone similarly looked at Qin Lie as well.

Everyone's hearts brightened. If not for Qin Lie's numerous and shocking performances, the Ling Family members which had gone on this trip would have been beyond redemption — the men would have died and Ling Yushi and Ling Ying would have had to suffer tragic fates that would have probably been worse than death.

Even Liu Yan and the Gao Family members would not have

escaped death. They would have all died together.

“Qin Lie, in the future when you are within Ling Town, are you still going to act the fool?” smilingly asked Ling Yushi, pursing her lips.

They were almost about to reach Ling Town; because of that, last night, Ling Yushi had changed from her practitioner attire into a light green robe. A floral pattern was sewn into the robe with blue crystals hanging from its corners. The robe gave her a noble beauty, and along with the ambient light within her beautiful eyes, she seemed bright and beautiful.

During this trip, not only had the Ling Family gained many spirit stones and spirit materials, they also made contributions towards Nebula Pavilion and gained the goodwill of Liu Yan. Even the issue that had constantly plagued her for a long time had been gotten rid of.

—Not only was her fiance not a fool, he was both outstanding and extraordinary and had constantly protected her.

Her worries were no more, and in turn she had gained things she could be happy about. This caused her to feel exuberant, so a faint smile constantly stayed on her face which gave her a radiant look.

Lately, everyone had noticed that the relationship between Qin Lie and Ling Yushi had become increasingly close. Upon hearing Ling Yushi teasing Qin Lie, they all began to laugh and look at Qin Lie.

“I wasn’t acting as a fool, I was only in a cultivating state. In the future, I might also be like that, so don’t be too shocked,” said Qin Lie, bitterly laughing. He reluctantly explained, “So in the future, when you see me in Ling Town and I’m like that, there is no need to act like it’s weird. Mn, I cultivate in that state, that is just the way it is.”

“It’s not weird, it’s not weird. Hehe, anything you do in the future will not be considered weird.” Ling Xiao boisterously laughed. “You were even able to repair Liu Yan’s Common Grade Five spirit artifact. You are even better than your grandpa in the past. What else can we find weird in the future? If there are too many weird things, nothing is weird anymore…”

As he said these words, everyone began to laugh uncontrollably. Indeed, Qin Lie had done so many weird things that they had gradually begun to get used to them.

“Forget it, I’m not going to keep talking with you all. I’m going to make a trip to Herb Mountain first to drop off the fire crystals. In a bit, I will go into town and eat a normal warm meal. You guys go first, there’s no need to wait for me. I will be there in a while,” said Qin Lie, chuckling.

“I will return with you,” said Ling Yushi with a serene smile. Naturally, she continued, “It has almost been a month since we left, so there is no rush at the moment. Go, I will simply wait here for a while.”

“We’re also not in a rush so we’ll just wait here for you,” said Ling Xiao with a great sense of obligation.

Ling Xin glared at him saying, “Idiot, First Miss wanted to walk home alone with Qin Lie. This guy really is stupid!”

After these words, everyone sobered up. All of them began to quietly laugh as they teasingly stared at the two of them.

Ling Yushi felt a little embarrassed and annoyed as her face slightly turned red. She snappily said, “As always, you sure have a lot to say!”

Ling Xin wasn’t angry at all. Scratching his head, he awkwardly and foolishly laughed twice, “First Miss, please forgive my mistake. I was wrong, I said it too loudly…”

Qin Lie was speechless. Within his heart, a slight warmth could be felt.

He couldn’t remember ten years ago, and he had spent the last five years cultivating in solitude. Thus, he had essentially no contact with people around his age, and this made him sometimes seem eccentric.

These days, however, he was getting along quite well with these members of the Ling Family. It made him very comfortable and made his heart feel a great deal of warmth. Especially Ling Yushi…

“Then I’ll go to Herb Mountain first.” Slightly smiling, he quickly nodded his head at everyone and then left to Herb Mountain.

After he left, everyone else all acted sensibly, immediately taking the initiative to head back to Ling Town first. Only Ling Ying pouted reluctantly, as if she had wanted to also stay and wait for Qin Lie.

“This girl, they are already engaged. What are you cutting in for?” quietly reminded Ling Xiao, grabbing her.

“They are only engaged and have yet to truly marry. Seriously. Whatever, I’ll just leave with you guys…” whispered Ling Ying in response.

Ling Yushi just watched everything happen, not saying anything to Ling Ying. After deeply pondering for a while, she said to everyone, “These past five years Qin Lie has been painstakingly cultivating. It is I… who disturbed his peaceful life and involved him in the matters of the Ling Family.”

Pausing for a moment, she furrowed her brows and then continued, “The chaotic, messy matters of the Ling Family should not be imposed upon him as he is completely unrelated. Thus, once we’ve all returned to normal, concerning over the matters pertaining to him… everyone please don’t say anything. He wants to just peacefully cultivate, we shouldn’t break that peace.”

“Mn, we all understand. Although the Ling Family has a ton of

terrible matters, they are all our own matters. We definitely shouldn't impose these upon him," said Ling Feng, nodding his head. He sternly continued towards everyone, "In a while, when we return to Ling Town, don't speak anymore about matters regarding Qin Lie. Otherwise, if other people learn of Qin Lie's strength, they will definitely pester him. That will definitely affect his cultivation."

Everyone expressed their understanding and promised not to gossip or discuss things concerning Qin Lie.

Not long after, under Ling Feng's urging, they all returned to Ling Town together.

Ling Yushi gracefully stood by herself at the foot of Herb Mountain, waiting. Suddenly, she recalled one of her most recent encounters with Qin Lie where she had carried Qin Lie by his legs back to Ling Town.

During that time, he had been lying on her back while closely pressed against her...

Thinking about it, her cheeks couldn't help but grow hot as she suddenly thought of a question: During that time, was that guy awake?

As the thought raced through her mind, waves began to ripple across her eyes and her face revealed an alluring, elegant expression.

Within the mines of Herb Mountain, Qin Lie had just entered, and his expression suddenly sank.

The mountain's interior was a complex system of mines. While he had been cultivating, his grandfather had personally worked on constructing it day by day. Tunnel after tunnel crisscrossed each other, forming strange formations which prevented outsiders from entering, so he could always have a quiet place to cultivate. A private little space where he could let himself loose.

Previously, due to Du Jiaolan's increasingly aggressive actions, Ling Chengye had no choice but to open the cave to the public, resulting in many Ling Family members entering the mountain to explore like a flock of birds.

Unfortunately, not a single martial practitioner of Ling Town was able to find the secret to the formations and break into their mysteries; they all gradually gave up on their own.

Today, however, at the entrance to the mine, there were clear traces of the formations having been broken through since several of the stone tunnels were blocked by giant boulders, thus changing the flow of air current within the tunnels. Furthermore, there were several newly opened tunnels which seemed to have been the initial method the trespasser utilized to break the formations.

——The Ling Family definitely didn't have people who could understand this.

So who could have done it?

Qin Lie deeply furrowed his brows, his heart constricting as he hurriedly followed the original path into the depths of the mountain. He hoped that no one had been able to enter the deepest part of the mountain.

That was his own private space. It was the crucial area where he had previously tempered himself with Heavenly Thunder Eradication and was also his own little paradise.

He couldn't allow any outsiders to enter!

Very quickly, he reached the interior of the caves. After discovering that everything was still normal, as well as the traces he had seen on his way, he surmised that formation breaker had yet to come in.

"It's okay. That person should not be able to break through the formations for the time being. I assume they must still be trying to figure out a method." After entering the cave, Qin Lie properly put away the fire crystals, and rubbed his chin for a while. His eyes gradually became cold. "If it wasn't a person from Ling Town, who could it be? What does this person want? Do they truly believe there is some treasure within the cave?"

Knowing that Ling Yushi was waiting for him outside, he didn't stay for long within the mines and quickly left.

Naturally, as soon as he exited cavern, he saw Ling Yushi prettily standing where she had originally been.

He didn’t know what she had been thinking about, but her cheeks had become flushed and there was an ambient light within her eyes. She didn’t have her usual alluring charm, and her elegance was different than usual. All of this gave Qin Lie a different impression.

“What are you thinking about so deeply?”Qin Lie suddenly called out softly, after quietly walking behind her.

Ling Yushi suddenly jumped. She had clearly been surprised. Upon realizing that it was just Qin Lie, a smile emerged again as she mischievously looked at him, pointed at him, and laughingly asked, “I was thinking of that time when I was carrying you home on my back. Were you awake?”

Unprepared, the skin on Qin Lie’s face suddenly trembled. Just when he wanted to strongly deny it, Ling Yushi had already seen it, shouting, “I knew it! I just knew it, you! You are truly rotten to the core!”

Embarrassed, Qin Lie dryly laughed, noncommittal no matter what she said.

However, Ling Yushi didn’t pursue it any further. Laughing, she rolled her eyes and said, “Since you tightly gripped my hand and helped me divide the pressure during the engagement ceremony, I will forgive you.”

At that time, she had to endure the ridicule and mocking from

her family members as well the harsh words of the Du Family. In that moment of extreme sadness and helplessness, it was Qin Lie who had tightly held her hand.

At that time, under the great pressure, she had unconsciously gripped with force and her nails pierced into Qin Lie's palm, yet Qin Lie didn't even utter a cry.

After the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, with her pure and noble heart, she had naturally been able to guess that Qin Lie had been awake then. Thus, she had often recalled that time, and whenever she did, her heart would be extremely moved.

Just that one matter was enough for her to forgive all of Qin Lie's sins. Not to mention, in the first place, the depths of her heart didn't contain even the slightest negative thought towards Qin Lie...

"The stone tunnels' formations within Herb Mountain are currently being destroyed by someone. The person shouldn't be someone of the Ling Family, do you have any idea who it might be?" in order to avoid awkwardness, Qin Lie changed the topic by quickly bringing up what he had just discovered. Simply explaining the circumstances, he continued, "That person understands formations and should be an artificer. However, their level shouldn't be too high considering that even after spending a long time, they weren't able to break through."

"There isn't even a need to guess, the culprit has to be Du Jiaolan. She probably told Du Haitian the circumstances surrounding Herb Mountain and had him arrange for people to

come over and try to break through it," decisively concluded Ling Yushi. "She has wanted to acquire Herb Mountain for a long time now, constantly scheming to replace my father as the Ling Family Patriarch. The mysteries within Herb Mountain are a point of entry for her, so she would naturally pay attention to it."

Qin Lie silently listened, his brows gradually furrowing as his face sunk.

The wondrous formations within Herb Mountain were personally made for him by his grandfather. Even if they truly needed to be destroyed, they would only be destroyed by his hands. No one else could interfere!

That cave was a sacred ground within his mind, his only private space. Even Ling Yushi hadn't been brought in, so how could an outsider enter!

Chapter 44: Heavy Pressure

Qin Lie and Ling Yushi were walking shoulder to shoulder along the small mountain path. They chatted along the way, unhurriedly heading towards Ling Town.

At Ling Town's entrance, the two of them could hear Du Jiaolan's piercing voice as she was scolding someone, echoing out from within the courtyard of Ling Family's main quarters.

Ling Yushi's pretty face changed and she said to Qin Lie, "Go ahead and get some rest, I'm going to check it out." After speaking, she rushed towards the main quarters.

Ling Chengye's family lived in the middle of Ling Town, right beside the martial arts arena. That was also where the ancestral hall was, and that area of residency had always belonged to the patriarchs of the Ling Family.

At that moment, intense arguing could be heard from that direction. Many of the Ling Family members could be seen gathering around to take a look at the commotion.

Qin Lie froze for a moment. After pondering for a while, his state of mind slightly shook, causing his eyes to returned back into a vacant state as he also emotionlessly made his way over.

Shortly after, he arrived at the site of the argument — the Ling Family courtyard at the back of the martial arts arena.

He was greeted by the sight of Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and the rest who had arrived earlier and were standing beside Ling Chengye. Ling Yushi had also joined her father's side after rushing over with a face full of worry. She was quietly asking her younger sister, Ling Xuanxuan the details of what had transpired.

Du Jiaolan had brought Du Qishan, Du Heng, and a group of martial practitioners dispatched by Du Haitian to confront Ling Chengye as she chastised and shouted at Ling Xuanxuan viciously.

At the sides of the Du Family, her youngest son, Du Fei was lying on a stretcher. His face was as pale as a ghost due to the severe injuries he sustained.

There were a few scratches on Ling Chengye's face as well which were probably inflicted by Du Jiaolan in her rage.

The Ling Family's three elders, Ling Kangan, Ling Xiang, and Ling Bo, were also present. Their expressions were heavy as they tried their best to get the two sides to talk things through.

Quite a large number of the Ling Family members were gathered at the sides of the courtyard, pointing and criticizing the Du Family's mother and sons furiously.

Qin Lie listened in from an inconspicuous corner, gradually coming to an understanding of what had exactly transpired.

Two nights ago, Du Fei attempted to take advantage of Ling Xuanxuan by drugging her with smoke when she slept, but was discovered by her. With his cultivation only at the sixth level of the Refinement Realm, he was brutally beaten up by Ling Xuanxuan and ended up with many broken ribs. Even his manhood was given a vicious stomp, likely to be unusable anymore...

After that happened, Du Jiaolan erupted with rage. She accused Ling Xuanxuan of slandering her son, purposefully scheming to grievously harm him.

That very night, she almost took to arms against Ling Chengye. Similarly, after Ling Chengye found out that Du Fei was harboring malicious intent towards his daughter, he exploded with anger. He had a intense quarrel with Du Jiaolan which was only broken up after the persuasion of the three clan elders into a temporary ceasefire.

Du Jiaolan returned home to check on Du Fei's injuries; discovering that the injuries were gradually worsening, she returned to clash against Ling Chengye once more.

Including today, that would be the fourth round already..

"Ling Chengye! You actually dare to bully us? A widow and some fatherless kids? You dare to treat us as nobodies? Fine! Just you wait, my Du Family will be here soon!" Du Jiaolan gestured wildly as she howled like a lioness. "My cousin will arrive in the afternoon. I'm curious to see whether you, Ling Chengye, would still dare to disregard me then? Your bitch of a daughter

venomously injured my son, resulting in his current state. I will never rest until I have settled the score!”

“You’re the bitch! Your whole Du Family are dogs and bitches!” Ling Xuanxuan’s eyes were bloodshot as she cursed back, refusing to show even the slightest bit of weakness. The way she gnashed and grit her teeth was just like a tigress.

“Your son deserved it!” Ling Yushi’s pretty face was also frosty after she found out the details of what happened. Her beautiful eyes glared at Du Jiaolan as she shouted, “It is already very forgiving of us not to kill Du Fei when he tried to carry out such a heinous act. Xuanxuan could be considered to be like a younger sister to him. For him to attempt such a thing, he is lowlier than a beast!”

“Mn, simply just a beast!”

“He deserves it, that’s just his karma. It’s already very lenient that we haven’t beaten him to death!”

“Agreed, agreed!”

The Ling Family clansmen at the sides were all set ablaze with righteous indignation as they echoed in agreement.

“Good! Very good! You guys actually dare to bully us outsiders?!” Du Jiaolan’s lungs were threatening to explode from rage, and her eyes were spewing a dark look of pure venom. “All of you had

better wait here for my cousin to come over from Nebula Pavilion. I will see how tough a nut you all are to crack when he arrives! If I do not obtain justice for my son, I, Du Jiaolan, shall leave Ling Town and never return!”

Upon hearing her mention Du Haitian, the previously outspoken members of the Ling Family immediately became silent.

Du Haitian was one of Nebula Pavilion’s five great elders, possessing a cultivation level at the middle stage Natal Opening Realm and was rumored that he would be breaking through to the late stage soon. His combat abilities were definitely stronger than Ling Chengye’s. Moreover, he still had three early stage Natal Opening martial practitioners under his command. On top of that, Du Haitian was the confidante of Liu Yuntao, a Vice Pavilion Master, and was highly regarded by him.

Du Haitian’s individual capabilities were already an entire level above the Ling Family’s, not to mention that he also represented Nebula Pavilion. If he really were to come here, the Ling Family… would have a tremendously difficult time in resolving this.

“What? Speechless? Lost your tongues?” Upon mentioning Du Haitian’s name, the majority of the Ling Family members turned silent. At this, Du Jiaolan became even more haughty as she continued amidst sarcastic laughter, “All of you’d better listen up. Regarding this matter with my son, I am determined to obtain justice! That little bitch must pay!” Her eyes were cold and dark like a cobra’s as she glared murderously at Ling Xuanxuan.

Affected by her stare that was full of killing intent, Ling

Xuanxuan felt a chill from the depths of her heart as her attractive body gave an involuntary shudder. She timidly asked, ”Big sister, was I wrong? Did I bring trouble to daddy and the clan?”

Pausing for a moment, she continued with sobs, ”That brute, Du Fei had gone mad! I... I really couldn’t tolerate it anymore!”

“It’s fine, don’t be scared. You did nothing wrong; he deserved it!” Ling Yushi held her hands tightly and soothingly comforted her, “On the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, we achieved huge merits for Nebula Pavilion. We do not necessarily have to fear that Du Haitian, so don’t you worry too much. If it was me, I would have heavily injured him as well, so don’t blame yourself anymore.

After being comforted, Ling Xuanxuan visibly became less burdened as one less worry loomed on her delicate face.

Qin Lie was observing silently from a corner when he noticed the two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, had slight changes in their expressions upon hearing that Du Haitian was arriving in the afternoon.

From the looks of it, the two brothers were adopting a tough stance. But in actuality, they were dreading the arrival of Du Haitian.

With even the two of them like this, what more could be expected of the members of the Ling Family?

Every member of the Ling Family had their eyebrows tightly knitted in worry, including the three clan elders. Many of the previously rowdy people were now all completely silent as though the existence of Du Haitian was like a mountain that was firmly pressing down on their chests. Their moods were extremely heavy as though they couldn't breathe from the pressure.

On the other hand, Du Jiaolan and company were all filled with arrogance with the assurance of their backer, tipping the balance into her favor with just a single swipe.

Even though Nebula Pavilion was only a force at the Limestone rank, they were still considered an existence far beyond the reach of subordinate clans like the Ling Family. Even though Du Haitian was a mere elder from Nebula Pavilion, it was enough to heavily pressure the entire Ling Family...

This amazed Qin Lie as he became further enlightened regarding the harsh, cruel rankings and distinctions between the different forces in Spirit Realm.

"We shall wait here for your uncle to arrive. Looking at the time, they should be arriving just about now. We will settle this with the Ling Family then!" Du Jiaolan and her few Du Family members found a spot to sit, evidently resting before the impending showdown.

Many members of the Ling Family were feeling downcast as they glanced towards the Du Family's mother and sons with eyes full of worry.

Ling Chengye frowned deeply as he signaled with his eyes towards Ling Chengzhi and called Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and the others back into the hall within the courtyard. He asked, ”How was the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain?”

Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and Ling Xiao were all attracted to the ruckus upon returning, and gathered together at the courtyard; they did not have a chance to report yet.

After they were summoned into the hall, upon hearing the patriarch’s question, they immediately became full of excitement.

“It was extremely dangerous and thrilling!” Ling Xiao took the lead to answer. “Patriarch, you have absolutely no idea! Our trip could be considered a close shave with death itself. It was seriously fraught with danger, and it was all due to Qin Lie…”

“Qin Lie?”

“Qin Lie?”

“Qin Lie?”

Ling Chengye, Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan’s faces were pointedly full of question marks as they stared strangely at Ling Xiao.

“Qin Lie went as well? How did he go?” Ling Chengye looked deeply at Ling Yushi and said, “No wonder I haven’t seen him recently, it turns out he went along with you to Celestial Wolf Mountain. What exactly happened there?”

“Did that fool become a burden? What did he follow for? Did he delay your mission?” When Ling Xuanxuan heard the words, “it was all due to Qin Lie,” she had thought that it was because of Qin Lie that the group had faced a great number of troubles. Knitting her eyebrows together, she chided, “Seriously, why did all of you bring along a fool when you’re carrying out a mission for Nebula Pavilion? Have you all gone mad?”

After these words, she discovered that Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and Ling Xiao’s expressions were gradually changing as though something wasn’t quite right...

It was especially true for Ling Xin and Ling Xiao as the expressions they had when they looked at her was exceptionally cold, evidently displeased at her words..

This caused Ling Xuanxuan to abruptly freeze.

“What happened? These people... what is up with them?” She was absolutely baffled at heart.

“If it wasn’t for the one that Second Miss keeps calling a fool, all of us would have suffered miserable deaths. First Miss and Ling Ying could also have very well met a fate far worse than death! Hmph!” Ling Xin suddenly snorted coldly.

Ling Xiao joined in the criticism, “If it wasn’t for Qin Lie, all of us would be corpses now…”

“Little sister, you should stop with your prejudice in the future. Qin Lie… is the benefactor to all of us.” Ling Yushi sighed lightly and then added, “Before you’re clear on the truth, you shouldn’t make up assumptions on your own.”

Ling Xuanxuan didn’t expect that her passing words would attract everyone’s angry looks and criticism. This made her small face freeze in place as it turned green in one moment and white the next, looking extremely awkward.

“What exactly transpired? Ling Feng, you tell us!” Ling Chengye ordered as his eyes slightly brightened, evidently curious.

“Yeah, what happened to make your attitudes towards him make a complete turn around?” Ling Chengzhi urgently interrogated.

“Patriarch! Patriarch! The people from Nebula Pavilion have arrived!” At this moment, surprised exclamations echoed from the Ling Family members outside, their tone carrying their obvious panic. “Other than Elder Du Haitian, there is also Elder Ye Yangqiu who is in charge of the Disciple Hall! They even brought the Hall Masters under their command! It’s not looking good!”

The expressions of the two brothers of the Ling Family, who were originally inquiring what had happened with Qin Lie, changed drastically upon hearing the sudden news. They took a

glance at each other, the terror apparent on each other's face.

Just Du Haitian alone was enough to give the Ling Family migraines, and now there was an additional Discipline Hall's Ye Yangqiu as well... The two brothers felt their heads going a bit numb.

"Why would Ye Yangqiu come? I have never heard of any ties between him and Du Haitian. Whenever the Discipline Hall's Ye Yangqiu appeared within any of the vassal forces, he would always be accompanied by the most brutal of punishments! What exactly did the Ling Family do wrong to actually warrant a visit by Ye Yangqiu himself?!" Ling Chengye said as his body shook and his face contorted in rage and terror.

"If it is just the matter of Xuanxuan heavily injuring Du Fei, it definitely isn't enough to move Ye Yangqiu. Moreover, he has always done things strictly by the book/rules. Other than the Pavilion Master himself, he would never do favors for anyone. He does not even deign to give face to the two Vice Pavilion Masters, Kang Hui and Liu Yuntao! Surely he would not make his way here for such a minor matter!" Ling Chengzhi was also starting to feel terror grow within his heart.

Ye Yangqiu was the Elder of Nebula Pavilion's Discipline Hall. Wherever he appeared, it would usually be accompanied by the most brutal of punishments. His arrival sank the hearts of every member of the Ling Family into the depths of hell!

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Chapter 45: Discipline Hall Elder

A group of martial practitioners appeared at Ling Town's entrance, their expressions cold and aloof.

The group of martial practitioners were evidently split into two sides, one side headed by Elder Du Haitian, the other headed by Discipline Hall Elder Ye Yangqiu. The two arrived together, yet they were distinctly separated.

Du Haitian's stature was tall and lean with short white hair and refined clothes. The look in his eyes was distant, making it hard for anyone to guess what he was thinking.

On the other hand, Ye Yangqiu was short and pudgy. It was unknown whether there was another reason or that the arts he cultivated in was special, but his skin was dark and greenish, making him look extremely strange and creepy. His eyes were frosty, and his entire body exuded a suffocating aura that warned strangers to stay away.

He walked shoulder to shoulder with Du Haitian into Ling Town, followed by their individual men. They were both elders of Nebula Pavilion; Ye Yangqiu was in charge of the Discipline Hall while Du Haitian was in charge of external combat, frequently leading his men to fight enemies from opposing martial forces or to hunt spirit beasts.

Usually, the two sides would not have any interaction. However, if any of Du Haitian's subordinates were to commit an offense, Ye

Yangqiu would have the authority to carry the punishments out.

Being Nebula Pavilion's most crucial Discipline Hall Elder, Ye Yangqiu was famous for being impartial. As long as anyone committed an offense and landed into his hands, he would punish the person accordingly, even if the offender was the direct subordinate of any of the elders. He would definitely not deign to give anyone face, even the two Vice Pavilion Masters—would find it wishful thinking to ask for any favors from him.

As such, Ye Yangqiu's notoriety spread far and wide within Nebula Pavilion. Every single martial practitioner within the pavilion was afraid of him, fearful of landing into his hands.

"Elder Ye, regarding the Ling Family's betrayal, what are your thoughts?" Du Haitian asked suddenly.

A couple of days ago, the Feng Family's Patriarch, Feng Bin, personally reported to Nebula Pavilion that the Ling Family had conspired with Shattered Ice Manor on Celestial Wolf Mountain's mine, resulting in the near annihilation of the Feng Family and Gao Family's members and Liu Yan's unknown fate. Feng Bin even handed over a letter that was exchanged between Ling Chengye and Shattered Ice Manor, said to be found from the body of a dead Ling Family member, in order to get Nebula Pavilion to severely deal with them.

On the presented letter was Shattered Ice Manor's Elder Yan Dewu's personal signature, accompanied by the seal unique to Shattered Ice Manor.

After Ye Yangqiu had investigated and confirmed that the seal truly belonged to Shattered Ice Manor, he was severely shocked and brought his subordinates to Ling Town.

Du Haitian was pondering on what excuse he should use to deal with the the Ling Family when he heard of this matter. On the premise that his cousin was also at Ling Town, he accompanied Ye Yangqiu over to deal with the Ling Family.

“It is yet to be determined whether there was a betrayal from the Ling Family, further investigation is still required.” Ye Yangqiu’s face was black as he spoke darkly, “If it is true, all parties involved in this matter will be executed!”

Pausing a bit, he continued, ”If your cousin and nephews had a part in this, hmph, they too will be dealt with!”

Upon hearing this, Du Haitian felt a chill from the depths of his heart. Chuckling dryly, he hurriedly said, “Elder Ye thinks too much. My cousin and nephews do not get along with Ling Chengye, therefore they are definitely not aware of such a thing. Elder Ye should definitely thoroughly investigate about this and avoid wronging them.”

“I will investigate thoroughly,” Ye Yangqiu said indifferently.

Du Haitian knitted his eyebrows and looked towards the Ling Family’s ancestral halls with a chilly look in his eyes.

It was halfway towards Ling Town that he received news of Du Fei's grievous injuries. It was also then that he made a resolution to make the Ling Family pay dearly with this trip, to cause the names of Ling Chengye and his family to completely disappear from Ling Town!

Ling Family's courtyard.

Ling Chengye and his brother lead the three clan elders out of the hall to welcome the Elders from Nebula Pavilion.

The Ling Family members that were gathered all wore heavy expressions that were full of worry, obviously displaying their nerve-wrecked faces. They were also distraught by the sudden arrival of Ye Yangqiu as they were clueless on what kind of calamity the Discipline Hall Elder, notorious for his brutal punishments, would bring to Ling Town.

On the other hand, Du Jiaolan and the others were all visibly delighted as excitement brewed within them while they thought to themselves, "Ye Yangqiu actually came? Let's see how you'll meet your demise, Ling Family!"

Qin Lie was positioned among the Ling Family members, towards the back where he was inconspicuous. He coolly observed on as the events unfolded, completely shocked by all of them.

"Even the Discipline Hall Elder is present. If it was merely about Ling Xuanxuan hurting another person, then was his physical

presence really required? It shouldn't be so, there should be another reason..."

He unconsciously thought back to the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, recalling Ling Feng and Ling Yushi's analyses before they had returned, and he gradually begun to start in the correct direction.

Amidst his serious pondering, he suddenly became aware of a pair of bright eyes shining over from the group of Ling Family members.

Paying closer attention, he discovered that the pair of eyes actually belonged to Ling Xuanxuan...

Ling Xuanxuan stood behind Ling Chengye, to the left of Ling Yushi, and was perfectly in place to look at him.

Mixed within that bright pair of eyes were complicated feelings such as alarm, astonishment, and confusion, obviously different from the usual contempt and condescension she had. Qin Lie was stunned for a moment as he was baffled.

"Was that fool... actually pondering? There was an instant when his eyes were bright and clear. Was it my eyes failing me?" Ling Xuanxuan looked at Qin Lie from afar, her maiden heart in complete disorder. "Why was big sister, Ling Xin and the others so protective of him? What exactly happened on that trip?"

Perplexed, she gradually realized that she couldn't get a read on Qin Lie at all. She couldn't tell whether Qin Lie was the fool she had always known or the one with the clear, bright eyes was the real Qin Lie...

"We welcome Elder Ye and Elder Du's arrival to Ling Town!"

Right as she was confused, her father, Ling Chengye's, loud voice pulled her back to reality.

Catching sight of the gradually nearing Du Haitian, accompanied by the solemn Ye Yangqiu, her small face revealed a look of shock. She felt burdened with worry again as she regretted not having held back against Du Fei, bringing troubles to the clan.

"Cousin!"

"Uncle!"

Du Jiaolan, Du Heng, and Du Fei all possessed expressions of glee upon the arrival of Du Haitian as they immediately greeted him. The eyes of Du Fei that was lying on the stretcher turned even redder as he looked extremely miserable.

Du Haitian's face twitched when he saw Du Fei's pitiful state. He lightly nodded his head towards Du Jiaolan and the rest, using his eyes to convey his resolution on this matter which gave them some relief.

One of the martial practitioners at his side walked over to Du Jiaolan and softly spoke a few words to her. The words brought immense happiness to her as she stared gratifyingly at Ling Chengye.

“I humbly invite the two Elders to talk within the main hall,” Ling Chengye said with a slight bow.

Du Haitian waved his hands and indifferently said, “There is no need to do so, we can talk here. Hehe, you guys sure are brave. You actually did something like this and still dare to continue staying at Ling town? Why have you not escaped to Shattered Ice Manor yet? Don’t tell me that Shattered Ice Manor was only using you guys and was not sincere in taking Ling Town under their wing?”

Upon these words, the expressions of all the members of the Ling Family fell as their hearts pulsed with fear.

Having any sort of interaction with Shattered Ice Manor was a big matter that warranted total clan extermination, how could they not be terrified?

“May, may I know what exactly is Elder Du implying?!” Ling Chengye’s face was as pale as a ghost. He tightly grit his teeth, then loudly spoke in a slightly shaky voice to Ye Yangqiu, placing emphasis on every single word and pause, “The Ling Family has never had any interaction with Shattered Ice Manor! May the two elders please investigate thoroughly!”

“You still dare to deny it?!” Du Haitian exclaimed loudly. “Feng

Bin has already submitted the letter you exchanged with Shattered Ice Manor's Elder Yan Dewu. What more do you have to say for yourself?"

"Let him have a look." Ye Yangqiu's face was impassive as he gestured with his hands.

One of his subordinates immediately walked before Ling Chengye and handed the letter over.

Ling Chengye took the letter with his severely trembling hands and saw handwriting that was extremely similar to his, Shattered Ice Manor's seal, and Yan Dewu's reply on it.

Ling Chengye felt like he was plunged into the depths of a frozen lake. He simply could not bring himself to believe what his very own eyes were seeing. After a long while, he protested vehemently, "I do not even know anyone from Shattered Ice Manor! I have been wrongfully accused! I am totally unaware of anything!"

"The ones who betrayed Nebula Pavilion were the Feng Family, not our Ling Family!" Ling Yushi walked over to her father's side as she spoke those words. Taking a deep breath, she continued agitatedly, "Feng Yi admitted it himself that the Feng Family had long pledged themselves to Shattered Ice Manor. They were in cahoots with Shattered Ice Manor, and tried to take over the Fiery Solar Jade Mine on Celestial Wolf Mountain. We were almost annihilated by them, Liu Yan can attest to that. May Elder Ye please investigate thoroughly!"

“Liu Yan is my subordinate, and he has yet to return to Nebula Pavilion. According to Feng Bin’s words, it is likely that Liu Yan has met his demise.” Ye Yangqiu paused for a moment and continued, “Why don’t you explain what exactly happened?”

Ling Yushi’s words were entirely different from Feng Bin’s. However, Feng Bin had presented a letter with Yan Dewu’s signature while the Ling Family had nothing in their defense. Even so, he was shaken by Ling Yushi’s mentioning of Liu Yan as he now had something more to think about.

“That was what happened…”

In the presence of the Ling Family members and Ye Yangqiu, Ling Yushi finely recounted the events that happened, paying extra care to recount even the smallest detail.

“Qin Lie found out about the Feng Family’s scheme and notified us in advance…”

“Under the assault of the Feng Family, Qin Lie first killed Feng Lun, then Feng Jie, eventually forcing Feng Yi to retreat…”

“Qin Lie repaired Liu Yan’s Hexagonal Shield…”

“Qin Lie pointed us in the right direction…”

“In the end, it was Qin Lie who retrieved the sculpture that led the Demon Wolf King to release us, turning it against Shattered Ice

Manor and causing them severe losses which resulted in Yan Dewu escaping for his life…”

During her narration, the name that came up the most was Qin Lie. After she mentioned Qin Lie time and time again, every member of the Ling Family and all the Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners were utterly shocked. They all revealed expressions of complete disbelief while simultaneously inwardly exclaiming the absurdity of the events.

The two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, had long guessed that Qin Lie was special. Hearing the excited chatters of disbelief, the two brothers shared a glance with each other and felt a surge of electricity flow out from within their bodies as their excitement secretly rose.

However, Ling Xuanxuan was dumbfounded. Her mind was blank as she listened to the fairy-tale like narration from her sister.

“Is it really him? The person who caught hold of the Feng Family’s scheme in advance, led the Ling Family to break through the assault, helped Nebula Pavilion’s Liu Yan to repair his spirit artifact, and borrowed the help of the Demon Wolf King to deal a heavy blow to Shattered Ice Manor… That person is actually the fool that I had always discriminated against?”

Upon thinking of this, her eyes glistened in shock as she hurriedly turned her head towards a certain direction only to find that Qin Lie was already gone.

Chapter 46: All Sorts Of Unfavorable Circumstances

"Absurd! Nonsense! Are people actually believing this rubbish?"

Words exploded out of Du Haitian's mouth, both interrupting the pondering of the crowd and causing them to be roused with incredible shock.

Afterwards, Du Haitian coldly laughed as he looked at Ling Yushi, making no effort to disguise the ridicule on his face. "Whether or not Qin Lie is a fool is still unknown. Even if he isn't a fool, do you believe that a martial practitioner of the Refinement Realm could actually take the reins and turn the tables in a certain death situation? And to say that he used the Demon Wolf King to kill off Shattered Ice Manor, that is even more laughable! You are telling me that a trivial wooden sculpture could make the Demon Wolf King yield — are you joking with us?"

His remark deluged the crowd in shock and caused of their expressions to become puzzled.

Ling Yushi's statements were truly hard to believe and caused doubt to emerge within the hearts of the crowd. They began to believe that with just Qin Lie's strength, it was unlikely for him to have been able to take the initiative and turn the tide, thus saving the Ling Family members from their despair while also killing Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners.

"Elder Ye, do you believe a single word that she said?" calmly

asked Du Haitian as he tilted his head.

Ye Yangqiu had also been silently pondering during this time.

In his eyes, Ling Yushi's words were definitely a bit too absurd and unrealistic. Thus, he also couldn't believe them.

"What actually happened is that the Ling Family must have conspired with Shattered Ice Manor, thus resulting in the near extermination of the Feng and Gao Families and also the sacrifice of the pavilion's Liu Yan. I say Feng Bin's words sounded much more reasonable and more trustworthy. Furthermore, the Feng Bin had the letters of communication between the Ling Family and Shattered Ice Manor. You checked them yourself, and they were indeed from Shattered Ice Manor," said Du Haitian.

"I also have a piece of evidence!"

At this moment, Du Jiaolan suddenly walked out, chuckling to herself as she looked at Ling Chengye with insidious eyes. Afterwards, she positioned herself below Ye Yangqiu and said, "When that fool was engaged to Ling Yushi, her engagement present surprisingly had a 'Hundred Vein Pill' and 'Sea Opening Pill.' There were also several high grade spirit stones. It's impossible that the Ling Family has such precious treasures!"

Coldly laughing, she said, "To think that they were illicitly acquired from Shattered Ice Manor!"

“Stop venomously slandering people! Those were Qin Lie’s, how could it have any relation with my Ling Family?” raged Ling Chengye, his expression anxious. Du Jiaolan’s remark had caused a cold sweat to cover his entire body.

“That fool has no morals or ability, how could he possibly have such precious spirit pills and stones? It was obviously secretly hidden away by you!” snapped Du Jiaolan as she coldly laughed. She continued, “At the time, I was perplexed. I was confused as to how so many spirit pills and stones suddenly appeared. No matter how much I pondered, I couldn’t figure out where they came from, but now I understand. You received them in exchange for conspiring with Shattered Ice Manor. Did you hope to use the engagement to cover up where those spirit pills and stones came from so that your daughter could use them openly? You truly calculated so deeply!”

After she put it that way, a chill arose within the depths of the hearts of the Ling Family members. They felt as if a catastrophe was about to arise.

In regard to the surprising matter during the engagement ceremony, everyone remembered it very deeply. They had also been confused as to where the spirit pills and stones within the engagement present had come from, unable to place the matters together.

—They truly didn’t believe that those things were Qin Lie’s.

Today, following Du Haitian and Du Jiaolan’s speeches, a portion of the Ling Family members also began to secretly doubt over

whether or not Ling Chengye had been conspiring with Shattered Ice Manor behind their backs to betray Nebula Pavilion in return for precious cultivation materials.

Once these thoughts had arisen, the look in their eyes towards Ling Chengye and his family also changed... becoming full of questions and anger.

Traitors... weren't accepted by anyone. Even if it was their own clansmen, no one would tolerate any kind of betrayal. It was an absolutely inexcusable crime!

Seeing the suspicious looks within the eyes of their family members, Ling Chengye and his daughters felt chills run up their backs. Ling Xuanxuan trembled as she nervously grit her teeth and felt her body becoming colder and colder.

Ling Yushi's face became extremely pale, giving birth to a sense of hopelessness. She never would have thought that Du Jiaolan's words would be so sharp, insidious, and spiteful. She realized that the Ling Family had all misjudged just how insidious and sinister she was.

The crime of betraying Nebula Pavilion was enough for the entire family to be beheaded. They were pretty much all damned to perdition!

"I truly don't know about those spirit pills and materials, they all came from Qin Lie. They have no relation with my Ling Family!" said Ling Chengye decisively, his expression sinking. He glared at

Du Jiaolan like a beast and continued, “It is all but your own speculating. Do you have any evidence that proves that those spirit pills and herbs were from Shattered Ice Manor?”

Du Jiaolan’s expression lagged for a moment. Then, she immediately and firmly rebuked, “Anyone with a discerning eye can see that it is true.”

As Du Jiaolan was unable to show any evidence that proved that the materials truly came from Shattered Ice Manor, Ling Chengye’s decisive statement caused people to only harbor suspicions as they were unable to truly confirm it.

“Do you still have the pill? A Sea Opening Pill… is most suited for use when one is breaking through into the Natal Opening Realm. You shouldn’t have refined it yet, right?” indifferently asked Ye Yangqiu, directing his question at Ling Yushi.

Stunned, Ling Yushi gently nodded, “It is still in my possession.”

“Bring out the Sea Opening Pill and let me look at it,” ordered Ye Yangqiu, sticking out his hand.

Ling Yushi didn’t say anything, carefully retrieved a jade bottle, and politely offered it up.

Under everyone’s gazes, Ye Yangqiu received the jade bottle. Opening it, a fragrant pill dropped out. He carefully observed the pill with squinted eyes.

After a few seconds, Ye Yangqiu's expression suddenly became cold as he sharply said, "It is actually from Shattered Ice Manor!"

As his words faded, Ling Yushi's graceful body violently trembled, and an extremely shocked expression emerged within her eyes. The Ling brothers and Ling Xuanxuan felt as if a bomb had exploded within their heads, giving birth to a feeling that the heavens wanted the Ling Family dead.

The eyes of Du Jiaolan, Du Haitian, and their followers all brightened up, all of their expressions extremely ecstatic.

It was also a giant surprise to all of the Ling Family members as each of them began pointing fingers at Ling Chengye, Ling Xuanxuan, and Ling Yushi, swearing at them and saying that they would die a thousand times over for their sins. For them to have actually dared to conspire with Shattered Ice Manor, it wasn't enough if they just died.

Only Ling Xin, Ling Feng, and the others who had experienced the attacks of Shattered Ice Manor themselves at Celestial Wolf Mountain knew that the Ling Family most definitely hadn't conspired with Shattered Ice Manor. Thus, they still made excuses for Ling Chengye, saying that the situation wasn't like what everyone thought.

However, in the eyes of others, their excuses... seemed truly lacking. Many placed them together with the others as traitors.

“I have a deep understanding of Shattered Ice Manor’s things. Upon this Sea Opening Pill, there is an extremely subtle imprint of shattered ice, the unique print of Shattered Ice Manor’s Artificers. Thus, I am able to definitely say that this Sea Opening Pill is from Shattered Ice Manor!” Raising the pill within his hand, Ye Yangqiu pointed towards a spot on the bottom half of the pill, bringing it in front of Ling Chengye so that he could see it clearly.

When Ling Chengye saw the imprint, his entire body froze.

Ye Yangqiu hadn’t baselessly slandered him. On the bottom of the Sea Opening Pill was indeed an extremely small imprint of shattered ice which could only be seen by observing closely.

After they had received the pill, because they were preparing to use it in the near-future, they had never opened the bottle and thus never knew about it.

“Is there anything else left to say?” asked Ye Yangqiu, his expression dark and frosty.

“The pill came from Qin Lie, we had completely no clue. I plead for Elder Ye to clear his mind and give the Ling Family a fair ruling!” beastialy shouted Ling Chengye, his eyes turning red.

“You still dare to speak in the face of death!” sharply shouted Du Haitian. He immediately continued, “But in all honesty, only the Ling Family Patriarch’s family should have conspired with Shattered Ice Manor. It should have nothing to do with the others, I beseech Elder Ye give a fair ruling.”

“First, seal off the courtyard,” commanded Ye Yangqiu.

The people below him immediately dispersed, surrounding the entire area and not allowing anyone to leave.

Upon seeing Ye Yangqiu’s commands, Du Haitian immediately smiled whereas Ling Chengye and his family immediately became ashen.

“Capture those who returned from Celestial Wolf Mountain and search them,” coldly continued Ye Yangqiu.

The experts under him immediately walked towards Ling Feng and the others, their expressions dark and cold as dense killing intent emanated out from every one of them.

One of the experts said, “Just previously, Liu Yan had been drinking liquor with me. I never would have thought that he would be done in by traitors. Once you fall into our hands, even if you want to die… it won’t be that easy!”

“What are you doing?” furiously asked Ling Xin, unsheathing his weapon as his expression became crazed. He shouted, “Holy shit, the Feng Family clearly insinuated us. We tirelessly killed enemies and escaped from countless life and death situations just to be dealt with by you all?”

“If not for Qin Lie, this daddy would have died long ago at the

hands of the Feng Family. Today, whoever dares to touch me will have to fight me!" irascibly said Ling Xiao.

"Whoever dares to resist will be killed on the spot!" indifferently said Ye Yangqiu.

"Ling Xiao, Ling Xin! Both of you shut up! None of you may move!" sharply cried Ling Yushi, about to cry, "Put down all of your weapons, I trust that Nebula Pavilion will definitely find out the truth! You all know that Brother Liu is on his way back to Nebula Pavilion right now. Although his route was longer than ours, he will definitely return to Nebula Pavilion!"

Hearing her words, Ling Xiao and Ling Xin both hesitated for a moment. Only after being yelled at again by Ling Chengye did they behave and put down their weapons without a fight.

Very quickly, Ye Yangqiu's underlings began to inspect Ling Xiao and the others' bodies, searching from the top all the way to the bottom for spirit stones and materials, as well as for some low grade spirit pills.

Ye Yangqiu picked out a few of the spirit pills and analyzed them. Upon discovering that they were all from Shattered Ice Manor, his expression became increasingly dark and cold.

Earlier, when Ling Yushi had explained the events that had happened, she hadn't said that they had gained spirit stones and pills of the bodies of the dead Shattered Ice Manor practitioners, hoping to keep those things secret. However, it had come back to

bite them...

"It seems as if you have truly gained many things from Shattered Ice Manor," coldly laughed Du Haitian.

Ling Chengye and his family all began to feel as if this was the end of the road for them as all of the evidence pointed against them. If Ye Yangqiu was any bit more brash, this evidence would have been enough for them to have been killed on the spot.

"Elder Ye, I believe that there is no need to return to the pavilion and review this. Let us just execute them now," said Du Haitian with a slight smile as he looked at Ling Chengye and his family with ice cold eyes. He continued, "My people can also help, and I can personally kill the Ling Family Patriarch as well..."

Ling Chengye suddenly erupted, "Du Haitian! Aren't you are deliberately going against my Ling Family just because you want the position of Ling Family Patriarch? Is it for your mistress and two bastards?! In the past you drove my wife to death, and today, you want to be the killer of my daughters and I. If I am to die today, I will drag you with me!"

At this point, Ling Chengye had pretty much collapsed. From within the depths of his heart, his many years of repressed anger finally erupted out, "Cousin? Indeed, Du Jiaolan is your cousin! Do you think people truly don't know about all the dirty things you two do? Du Jiaolan had Du Heng seven months after arriving within my Ling Family, you are very clear whose seed he is within your heart!"

“Two years later, she made a trip to Nebula Pavilion and gave birth to Du Fei! You two both know very clearly just whose cheap seeds they are! As for how my second brother died, I am also very clear about that as well!”

“Stop spitting out slander!” shrieked Du Jiaolan. “Your second brother died from bodily explosion in his cultivation, it had nothing to do with me!”

“Even in the face of death you dare to accuse others?” asked Du Haitian, his expression extremely like a bird of prey. “To unwarrantedly spout nonsense, it is a shame that you are a patriarch. Indeed, dying isn’t enough to atone for your sins.”

Looking at Ye Yangqiu, his expression became embarrassed as he awkwardly smiled and said, “The matters that Ling Chengye brought up are but the actions of a mad dog. I plead Elder Ye to pay no heed to his nonsense.”

After a moment, he then said, “How about we join hands and kill him first together? The rest can be taken back to the pavilion for interrogation. How about that?”

Ye Yangqiu furrowed his brows, a dark cold light flashing through his eyes. After pondering for a moment, he said, “Whether it be the appearance of pills at the engagement ceremony or the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, there is one person connecting the two... where is this person? I would like to meet him and listen to what he has to say. He is called Qin Lie,

right? Bring Qin Lie over for me!”

“There is no need to worry about him, Qin Lie is but a fool. Ling Chengye and Ling Yushi, this father and daughter pair, are only using this fool to spew nonsense and to lessen their implications. What fool can offer spirit pills, what fool can turn the tide and help the Ling Family escape and cause the Demon Wolf King to attack Shattered Ice Manor and everything else that they said? They are all just excuses,” said Du Jiaolan, smiling sweetly at Ye Yangqiu. She continued, “Whether we look for Qin Lie or not, it is the same. The fool cannot speak as there is a problem with his head. Even if we bring him over, he will be of no use.”

“Lowly slut who f*cked her cousin, who are you calling a fool?” At this time, from behind the crowd of Ling Family members, a voice people were unfamiliar with suddenly emanated over.

……

Chapter 47: Coming Out

Gathered within the Ling Family's large courtyard were many of the Ling Family clansmen as well as some of Nebula Pavilion's powerful practitioners.

At the moment, everyone was astonished by the words coming from behind them. They couldn't help but look for the origin of the sound. The person who had spoken — a thin figure suddenly appeared in front of them.

"Qin Lie!"

"It's actually Qin Lie!"

"He, he's finally opened his mouth and talked!"

Many of the Ling Family members had shocked expressions. They couldn't help but cry out loudly, each one acting as if it were the first time that they had met Qin Lie.

In these last five years, this person had always been ignored, and even held in disgust and in contempt as a fool. However, when disaster had struck the Ling Family, he had actually stood up and spoke for the first time, verbally attacking Du Jiaolan with the most vicious words!

Ling Yushi's eyes quickly began to shine with a shocking radiance as she unwaveringly looked at Qin Lie this very moment, her

maiden heart endlessly agitated.

"In my darkest hour, it's you again. It's you who has stood up once again..." silently thought Ling Yushi as she secretly clenched her fists. That thin figure had already been deeply etched into her mind.

"It's him. He's actually not a fool, the fool... was actually me." Atop Ling Xuanxuan's lovely and innocent face, an indescribable expression emerged, one which was seemingly remorseful, yet guilty and self-depreciating — all kinds of feelings were mixing together.

Under one extremely shocked gaze after another, Qin Lie walked forward through the sea of Ling Family members who had split for him to the center of the courtyard, arriving in front of Du Jiaolan.

As the dumb, lifeless look disappeared from his eyes, it was replaced by a clear and bright radiance, setting off his originally extraordinarily delicate, handsome face. At the moment, Qin Lie... was incomparably elegant and handsome. Everyone felt as if a blinding light had suddenly appeared right before their very eyes.

"Slut, who are you calling a fool? Where are your two cheap seeds?" He indifferently smiled, glancing at Du Heng and Du Fei. Ignoring the livid expressions of the mother and two sons, he continued on as he planned, saying, "It seems true, that rumor that incestual relations give birth to mostly retarded sons..."

His remark caused the crowd to go into an uproar. Looking

towards the mother and her two sons, their expressions seemed extremely monstrous.

“S-such a venomous mouth… is this truly Qin Lie? Heavens, is he crazy?”

“He sure knows how to speak, huh!”

“This guy, he knows Du Haitian is still here, right…? He must truly be crazed.”

Many people’s eyes flashed as they all began to quietly whisper to each other. They felt shocked because of how unfamiliar they were with a talking Qin Lie.

“I will f*cking kill you, you little bastard!”

The eyes of Du Heng, who had cultivated to the eighth level of Refinement, suddenly reddened as he rushed over like an enraged mad dog.

A faint gold light circulated amongst his right hand as his five fingers curved strangely, resembling the unfurled wing of a flying bird. Right as he was about to reach Qin Lie, he suddenly shouted, and his surging spirit energy suddenly gushed out and condensed into a golden spirit bird about the size of a sparrow which shot towards Qin Lie’s chest.

Ling Yushi panicked as if she had lost her mind, unconsciously

shouting out a tender reminder, “Qin Lie, watch out! That Golden Spirit Bird is a Common Grade Five spirit artifact, which is the same level as Liu Yan’s Hexagonal Shield!”

The Golden Spirit Bird was a spirit artifact which had been procured for Du Heng by Du Haitian. Normally, it was shaped as an armband which Du Heng hid within his right sleeve. It was hard to notice during a fight and allowed him to instantly exert the power of a spirit artifact to take advantage of an unsuspecting enemy.

For Du Heng to directly start off with the Golden Spirit Bird caused Ling Yushi to feel anxious. She knew very well just how terrifying that Golden Spirit Bird was and feared that Qin Lie was going to suffer.

Du Haitian’s impassive face had also been enraged by Qin Lie’s remarks, but he couldn’t make a move himself due to his status. Upon seeing Du Heng charge over, he was secretly delighted and hoped for Du Heng to immediately kill Qin Lie once and for all.

Surprisingly, Ye Yangqiu also didn’t bother saying anything to stop Du Heng as he coldly observed from the side, seemingly wanting to continue watching.

From his point of view, if Qin Lie was truly like what Ling Yushi had said, being able to turn the tide at Celestial Wolf Mountain, then it shouldn’t be difficult for him to block Du Heng’s attack.

If Ling Yushi was lying and what happened at Celestial Wolf Mountain was fake, then all of the Ling Family members were

traitors. If it was like that, even if Qin Lie was killed, it was deserved!

"Zzzt zzzt zzzt!"

Under everyone's stares, an electric current suddenly began to concentrate and interweave around the sculpture held within Qin Lie's raised left hand, forming a giant web of discharging lightning.

Upon flying into the web of lightning, the golden bird which had been condensed out of Du Heng's spirit energy was hit by the discharging electric current and instantly dissipated into nothingness.

Not even waiting for Du Heng to react, Qin Lie, who had long since known it would be like this, suddenly appeared beside Du Heng, his right lightning-covered fist violently rumbled and shot towards Du Heng's chest.

Du Heng's face was full of shock as he hurriedly regathered spirit energy. He was only barely able to condense a small cluster of golden clouds atop his hand before having to turn and welcome Qin Lie's fist.

"Boom!"

The sound of exploding thunder suddenly emanated over from the two colliding fists, causing everyone's ears to ring.

The golden cloud atop Du Heng's hand was immediately blown up by the lightning and dispersed into small, twinkling golden stars. The serene blue lightning became increasingly fierce and violent as it followed along Du Heng's fist and twined around his arm. It was as if a blue electric snake had begun to spread around Du Heng's entire body!

Furthermore, his body flew back, as if it had been hit by a charging armored chariot, with his feet in the air, unable to touch the ground.

"Thump!"

He was unable to control himself as he was forced all the way back, to the side of Du Fei's stretcher. He fell bottom first onto the stretcher, knocking into the bruised Du Fei, and also caused him to shriek miserably.

"Th-this truly Qin Lie? Have my eyes gone blind?"

"I-I remember I used to curse at him for being a fool. I hope... I hope he didn't hear me."

"Heavens, is this the true Qin Lie?!"

As if it were their first time meeting him, all of the Ling Family members looked at Qin Lie as if they were looking at a monster.

Especially Ling Xuanxuan. As she gazed at Qin Lie, she nervously grinded her teeth with an extremely complex look in her eyes...

Ye Yangqiu also stared blankly for a moment. Clearly, he had also been shocked by Qin Lie as he finally began to truly consider Ling Yushi's statements and felt that they might actually be true.

Under the rows of amazed gazes, Qin Lie didn't stay his hand. Like a cruel and fierce beast which had gone mad, he continued chasing after Du Heng, seemingly wanting to take advantage of when Du Heng couldn't gather spirit energy to kill him on the spot.

This violent, wild, overbearing, and crazed aura immediately astonished everyone and caused their expressions to all suddenly change.

Before Qin Lie had made his move, he had seemed delicate and pretty, his thin figure making him look as weak as a girl.

But as soon as he had launched an attack, he seemed to have turned into a fierce primitive beast. That kind of violent, crazed, fierce aura, along with the booming sounds of exploding thunder and lightning had so greatly contrasted with his weak first impression that everyone was thoroughly dumbfounded!

They couldn't help but begin to doubt, doubt if the calm Qin Lie from before and the current violent Qin Lie were two different people.

“Little brute! You’re courting death!”

Seeing Qin Lie rush over, Du Jiaolan’s hair began to fly wildly. She wretchedly cried out as a purple colored halo began to flash around her body and was about to make a move to kill.

Upon seeing her stance, Ling Chengye cried out and rushed towards Du Jiaolan.

Du Haitian’s expression was insidious, his face cold, as he himself was also about to get involved.

Ling Yushi, Ling Xuanxuan, Ling Chengzhi, and the rest of the Ling Family members also began to cry out. The scene within the courtyard was almost out of control.

“All of you, stop!”

At this time, Ye Yangqiu’s ruthless ice-cold voice emanated. Like a ghost, he suddenly appeared beside Qin Lie and placed his hands on Qin Lie’s shoulders. Afterwards, he darkly gazed upon Du Haitian.

As soon as those hands were placed on him, Qin Lie felt as though a huge mountain was pressing down on him, that his feet were encased in lead. Unable to move, he could only give up on chasing Du Heng.

He looked at the skinny, middle-aged, and hunched figure next to

Du Heng who wore the black robes of an artificer, his eyes frigid.

Qin Lie had been secretly hiding in the crowd earlier, quietly observing. He discovered that Du Jiaolan now had one more artificer and immediately determined that this artificer was definitely the one who had broken the formation Herb Mountain. Thus, he had felt extreme distaste towards the Du Family.

Later on, when he saw how the Du Family's slander caused Ling Yushi's eyes to become red, he had almost wanted to cry out in grief, becoming even further unable to repress the increasing rage within his heart. Finally, he could no longer hold it in. An eye for an eye, he used the same vicious words to slander the Du Family.

He never expected that Du Heng would suddenly rush at him and try to kill him. This caused his inner rage to be completely ignited, causing it to come exploding out.

"Whoever dares move, don't blame the Discipline Hall for punishing them!" coldly shouted Ye Yangqiu.

Upon hearing the two words "Discipline Hall," the situation that was going out of control miraculously calmed down immediately.

Not only did Ling Chengye and his people back down, even Du Haitian restrained himself, his gloomy face trembling. They all calmed down, and no one dared to move impulsively.

"I have no interest, nor do I care about the disputes between the

Ling and Du Families!" exclaimed Ye Yingqiu after everything calmed down. Furrowing his brows, he coldly looked at both sides and then continued, "The point of my trip here was just to investigate whether or not the Ling Family conspired with Shattered Ice Manor and betrayed Nebula Pavilion!"

As he spoke, the Discipline Hall martial practitioners dispersed, their dark eyes warning the previously reckless practitioners to calm down.

The crowd scattered as everyone returned to their original positions. The Ling and Du Families were also separated, unable to start another fight.

Only Qin Lie and Ye Yangqiu were still standing in the center amongst everyone.

Ye Yangqui was still holding Qin Lie by the shoulders, so Qin was unable to move. At this time, he unconsciously furrowed his brows and said, "That's enough, I won't make attack anymore. Let go."

At that moment, Du Heng stood up again. His face was extremely ugly as he venomously looked at Qin Lie with resentment and hatred hidden within his eyes.

Ye Yingqiu's dark and cold eyes deeply looked at Qin Lie for a moment. Finally, he let go of Qin Lie, coldly asking, "Are these Hundred Veins Pills and Sea Opening Pills which bear the imprint of Shattered Ice Manor actually yours, or are they the Ling Family Patriarch's?"

“Mine,” simply replied Qin Lie.

“Where did you get them from?” asked Ye Yangqiu.

“Within a mountain valley within the Arctic Mountain Range. I gained them as spoils of a battle after killing several of Shattered Ice Manor’s people,” replied Qin Lie.

“Do you have proof?” asked Ye Yangqiu, narrowing his eyes.

Qin Lie furrowed his brows and pondered for a while. Suddenly, he thought of something. From his chest, he took out the jade tablet with a round nebula design and casually passed it over to Ye Yangqiu. Unsure if it would work, he asked, “Can this prove it?”

……

Chapter 48: Nebula Token

Qin Lie had gotten the nebula jade tablet from Tu Ze earlier, and Tu Ze had clearly told him that this jade token would allow him to directly enter Nebula Pavilion and immediately become a core member.

With it, he wouldn't need to reach the Natal Opening Realm before turning twenty to be qualified to enter Nebula Pavilion like Ling Xuanxuan or Ling Yushi needed to.

At that time, Tu Ze had also added that after he arrived at Nebula Pavilion and showed his jade tablet in the future, they might even need to take it back.

—One could see that this jade tablet probably had a little history of its own.

It was true that he had only his words to prove his adventure of killing the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners with Tu Ze and the others really happened. The only evidence he could think of would be this jade tablet.

Of course, he himself wasn't sure if this jade tablet would actually persuade anyone, so after he passed it to Ye Yangqiu, he too felt some doubt within.

Hence him looking at Ye Yangqiu's reactions closely...

Ye Yangqiu was consistently a stern and indifferent person. He carelessly accepted the jade tablet and frowned while leaning forward to take a look, and suddenly, he froze.

With the jade tablet in his hand, it seemed his entire body had turned stiff as he just stood there motionlessly without making any sound whatsoever for a very long time.

The Ling Family clansmen were all tense and looked anxiously at Ye Yangqiu. Every single one of them were holding their breaths, hoping that Qin Lie could prove that the Ling Family was innocent and that he had no ties whatsoever with Shattered Ice Manor.

Ling Chengye, Ling Yushi, Ling Xuanxuan and everyone else had their eyes all set upon Ye Yangqiu while experiencing the same anxiety.

“My lord…”

Seeing no reaction from him after a long while, a hall master under Ye Yangqiu could not help but exclaim softly.

Amidst the alarmed and doubtful looks, Ye Yangqiu finally came to his senses. After a moments consideration, he then lifted the jade tablet in Du Haitian’s direction, without a word, so that they could see the nebula diagram on it.

Du Haitian took a single glance and abruptly his entire expression turned to horror as he screamed out, “A Nebula Token?

Impossible! How can it possibly be a Nebula Token?!”

The moment the words “Nebula Token” fell out into the open, every martial practitioner from Nebula Pavilion became stunned with surprise. Countless looks of extreme shock quickly gathered on Qin Lie.

Every martial practitioner from Nebula Pavilion knew the exact origins of the Nebula Token and what it represented.

The Nebula Tokens were made specifically under the request of the old Pavilion Master Tu Shixiong, and there were only two of them that existed in the world. He had left them specifically for his two sons.

Tu Shixiong had built Nebula Pavilion from scratch with his own hands, and he had broken through into the Manifestation Realm twenty years ago, thus successfully entering Dark Asura Hall.

Back in the day, when he first left Nebula Pavilion and joined Dark Asura Hall, he only had his eldest son Tu Mo. His wife’s cultivation realm was low, so she could not enter Dark Asura Hall with him. Therefore, he could only leave his wife and Tu Mo back at Nebula Pavilion.

He would go through fire and water for Dark Asura Hall many years after. There would even be numerous rumors of him, from Dark Asura Hall, having fought to his death on the “Nether Battlefield.”

At the time, Tu Mo was still somewhat young and could not help Nebula Pavilion which was why the position of pavilion master was left empty.

There were also the constant rumors from Dark Asura Hall that Tu Shixiong had fought to his death, and it gave birth to the many trials and dangers within Nebula Pavilion to obtain the position of pavilion master; it nearly took away Tu Mo's life.

Later, not only had Tu Shixiong managed to survive the Nether Battlefield, he was even conferred the position of "Commander." He then immediately returned to Nebula Pavilion and killed all who conspired against him. After that, he stayed in Nebula Pavilion for a period of time, during which he and his wife contributed to the birth of his second son Tu Ze.

Tu Ze's birth made Tu Shixiong incredibly happy, and he specifically requested for an artificer in Dark Asura Hall to make two Nebula Tokens to give to his sons.

These two unique Nebula Tokens were filled with the great love he had for his sons. Not only would the command token enhance any practitioner who cultivated using Nebula Pavilion's special art formula, it also represented his authority and was a mark of his unmatched and status in Nebula Pavilion. It was a deterrent towards all martial practitioners under the pavilion who held disloyalty in their hearts.

Back to the present. His eldest son Tu Mo had reached the late stage of the Natal Opening Realm long ago, and he was very close to breaking through to the Manifestation Realm. Not only that, he

was also firmly seated as the pavilion master of Nebula Pavilion for quite some time now and simply did not need the Nebula Token any longer. Over time, this caused the Nebula Token to gradually become just a symbol of a sovereign's identity.

Only Tu Mo and Tu Ze possessed the Nebula Tokens, and they were also the unique representation of the two brothers. If they wanted to send someone on an errand, they only needed to show the tokens to get it done.

Since Tu Mo was now the pavilion master of Nebula Pavilion, the Nebula Token was gradually known otherwise as the Pavilion Master Command Tablet...

"I have examined it closely and confirmed that this is definitely a Nebula Token!" Ye Yangqiu ignored Du Haitian's cries and nodded towards Qin Lie amidst the faces of the Ling Family bursting with mad joy. His cold eyes finally softened, "This Nebula Token belongs to Tu Ze, correct? If he's willing to lend you his Nebula Token, then it is enough to prove that you cannot possibly share any relations with Shattered Ice Manor. It will seem that you have spoken the truth and that those spirit pills were indeed looted off of the corpses of Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners."

The moment those words escaped Ye Yangqiu's lips, everyone in the Ling Family let loose an expression of pure relief. Finally, they could put down their hanging hearts.

Surprise bloomed within Qin Lie's heart. He had not expected the jade tablet Tu Ze had given him would work this well, completely wiping away Ye Yangqiu's suspicions of him in an instant.

—Up till now, he still did not know what the Nebula Token truly represented.

“My lord, I suddenly remembered something.” The eyes of a hall master, a subordinate of Ye Yangqiu, lit up at this moment as he said suddenly, “Not long ago when I went to visit Elder Han, I heard from him that there was a junior in the Ling Family who had saved his son Han Feng’s life from the hands of Shattered Ice Manor’s Yan Ziqian in the Arctic Mountain Range. He was even rewarded with one thousand and two hundred contribution points. As you know, Han Feng and Tu Ze often mingled, and they often went outside to hunt together…”

“My lord, I have some impression too about the matter; I believe I’ve heard this before from Kang Zhi,” Another person expressed his opinion.

Ye Yangqiu appeared stunned for a brief moment before he stared intently at Qin Lie, a trace of surprise leaking out of his eyes. “You are that Ling Lie, aren’t you?”

Qin Lie coolly smiled back in affirmation.

From behind him, Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan were excited beyond words when they heard the news. Their eyes suddenly lit up as they stared firmly at Qin Lie’s back.

They could still remember the day Nebula Pavilion’s guards intentionally made life difficult for them to the point where they

couldn’t even step through the front door. Ling Xuanxuan was even harassed for quite a while by them...

At a critical moment, it was the name “Ling Lie” that had rescued them from their peril. Kang Zhi had beaten up and humiliated their own guards for “Ling Lie.”

Elder Han Qingrui had accepted them enthusiastically because of “Ling Lie,” and even exempted the Ling Family from two years of tribute.

Once they returned from Nebula Pavilion, the entire family had been looking for this elusive “Ling Lie.” Unfortunately, they had only found a bedridden Ling Lie.

They had suspected Qin Lie before, but they quickly found their own assumptions to be absurd. They simply assumed that Nebula Pavilion had made a mistake and was even quite worried about the outcome for a while.

Now that they heard Ye Yangqiu and the other Nebula Pavilion martial practitioner’s explanations and saw both the Nebula Token and Qin Lie’s cool smile, they finally realized that — the one who had saved the Ling Family from their predicament was none other than Qin Lie!

Light bloomed inside the two sisters’ eyes. Both sisters were feeling excitement in their hearts, and Ling Xuanxuan’s eyes had even turned slightly red...

On the other hand, Du Family's Du Haitian and Du Jiaolan wore a gloomy expression on their faces, and they looked at Qin Lie with a kind of shock and fear that was akin to seeing a ghost in broad daylight.

No matter how much they plotted, they could never have expected that the fool that they had scorned would suddenly appear without warning at this most critical juncture, and not only had he wiped away their accusations, he was also somehow related to the most powerful people in Nebula Pavilion, the Tu Family, turning the entire situation away from Ling Family's near certain destruction.

"As for the part at Celestial Wolf Mountain..." Qin Lie's tone remained cool and collected as he stared into Ye Yangqiu's eyes and said, "If you cannot believe our words, then please wait for another five to six days for Liu Yan's report. Hm, it should take him six days at most to reach Nebula Pavilion, and by now, Gao Yu should have returned to Gao Family already. You can also ask him to stand witness for us."

"Elder Ye, please give us the time to prove our innocence!" Ling Yushi begged sincerely.

Ye Yangqiu narrowed his eyes and thought for a moment. He suddenly said, "Release the Ling Family clansmen."

Every Ling Family member relaxed because of his words. They knew that he no longer saw them as traitors, and this change in attitude was of paramount importance to the Ling Family!

“Do forgive my many offenses earlier, little brother.”

“Yes, we had acted too rashly. We’re really sorry.”

When Ye Yangqiu’s subordinates helped Ling Xing, Ling Xiao and the others with their bonds, they were all smiling embarrassedly and repeatedly offered their apologies.

They had already believed Qin Lie’s words from the bottom of their hearts, and that was why their attitudes had undergone a massive change.

“If what you said is true, then... the Feng Family cannot be forgiven!” A hall master under Ye Yangqiu uttered with a cold expression, “Feng Bing must be tired of living. How dare he collude with Shattered Ice Manor, and even slander the Ling Family with extreme maliciousness. Nebula Pavilion will never forgive him!”

“Send a hawk messenger to contact the pavilion, and tell them that the moment Liu Yan returns, he is to report to me about this incident immediately!” Ye Yangqiu yelled coldly.

“Yes sir.” The martial practitioner accepted the order and immediately ordered his own subordinate, and before long, a gray shadow hawk broke towards the skies.

“Keep this Nebula Token to yourself.” Ye Yangqiu returned the command token to Qin Lie and frowned. “If what you’re saying is

true, then the Feng Family must hate the Ling Family to the core to use such an evil ploy to frame the Ling Family. On one hand, they wished that we would make an error in judgment and inflict the Ling Family with great misfortune. On the other, they were using this opportunity to move away so they could settle within Shattered Ice Manor's grounds and restart their cultivation."

"Mn, it must be like that." Qin Lie nodded quietly.

"Elder Du, what other opinions do you have to offer on this matter?" Ye Yangqiu suddenly looked towards Du Haitian with a dark expression, and his tone suggested that it was accusatory.

Du Haitian's gaze was dark with uncertainty, and with a frown, he said indifferently, "This is the Discipline Hall's matter, so I have no authority to interfere. Elder Ye will surely bring this mystery to light. The reason I'm here is to bring my cousin and nephews back to the Du Family. That's all."

He looked towards Du Jiaolan, Du Heng, Du Fei and the rest and said, "It looks like the Ling Family does not welcome us, so you lot may as well come home with me and stay there for a while. I have left the Du Family for Nebula Pavilion for such a long time, and I haven't found much opportunity to return home, so I shall accompany you all and take a look around."

Du Jiaolan and the others kept quiet and did not answer. Beneath the Ling Family's scornful gaze, they disgracefully left Ling Town together with Du Haitian.

……

Chapter 49: Eighth Level

Ye Yangqiu and the Discipline Hall's martial practitioners had stayed at Ling Town temporarily while they waited for the pavilion's response.

Now, after the huge incident at the Ling Family's great courtyard, every Ling Family member's eyes were filled with a combination of curiosity, fear, and regret whenever they looked at Qin Lie.

Many Ling Family martial practitioners held gratitude and respect towards Qin Lie, and both Ling Xing and Ling Xiao would often look for Qin Lie to go drink and have some fun.

There were even many bold Ling Family maidens, who dressed both brightly and beautifully, often loitering around Qin Lie's stone house...

Every day, when Qin Lie traversed back and forth from Herb Mountain, the eyes of the Ling family would fall upon him, and sometimes, even martial practitioners from Nebula Pavilion would smile and greet him.

All of the sudden, Qin Lie had become the most sought after person in Ling Town, and even Ling Yushi had trouble trying to talk to him alone.

—He was simply too striking at the moment.

On an afternoon five days later, a messenger hawk appeared in the sky above Ling Town and landed on a Discipline Hall practitioner's shoulder.

The messenger hawk had brought over news from Nebula Pavilion.

Ye Yangqiu read the entire letter in front of Ling Chengye and the family, and once he finished, he nodded towards Ling Yushi and said, "Liu Yan has explained the entire matter. Not only has the Ling Family done nothing wrong at all, you have also done a great service for Nebula Pavilion. Especially Qin Lie... his contribution points in Nebula Pavilion have reached a total of three thousand. All of it has been recorded by Elder Han Qingrui."

All the tension left Ling Chengye's body, and he thanked the Elder many times over; a smile of relief had finally appeared on his face.

Ling Yushi's eyes sparkled as she answered with quiet elegance, "I thank Elder Ye for clearing our Ling Family's name."

"No, I should be the one to thank the Ling Family, to thank... Qin Lie." Ye Yangqiu remained as cool as ever. "The reason that subordinate of mine, Liu Yan, survived was completely due to Qin Lie turning the Devil Wolf King against Yan Dewu. Otherwise, Liu Yan could not have survived, and furthermore, Gao Yu and the others would have all been killed as well."

The moment he said that, the Ling Family clansmen became filled with untold emotions.

No matter how vivid their imaginations were, there was no way they could've predicted that the person who saved the Ling Family from disaster time and time again would be the one whom they had looked down upon for the last five years, Qin Lie the fool.

—Ling Xuanxuan had felt especially guilty during the past few days, and was too ashamed to look for Qin Lie and express her apologies.

"While we have proven the Ling Family's innocence, the Feng Family's devious plot has also succeeded. We have gotten news that the entire Feng Family has moved inside Shattered Ice Manor's domain. It will be slightly troublesome if we are to act against them now," Ye Yangqiu said with a frigid face, and after a moment of thought, he said suddenly to Ling Chengye, "Ten years ago, about Du Haitian framing the Ling Family and causing the sacrifice of your wife and your clansmen... I shall investigate this matter. Even if Du Haitian is an Elder, I will find out the truth and bring justice to the Ling Family."

Hearing his words, Ling Xuanxuan and Ling Yushi's eyes reddened, and they were excited beyond control.

The two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, could only thank him yet again, unsure of what else to say.

"I cannot fully guarantee that Du Haitian will face the

punishment he deserves. He is after all... an Elder with rank equal to mine. But the pawns who had carried out his orders on his behalf should fail to escape the Discipline Hall's punishment. Please be prepared for whatever comes next," Ye Yangqiu continued.

"We understand! We understand Elder Ye's difficulties," Ling Chengye quickly answered.

"This is it. We have stayed in Ling Town for too long, and it's about time we go back and reassume our responsibilities." Ye Yangqiu turned down Ling Chengye's urgings to stay, and after he took care of the matters on hand, he then led his subordinates and left Ling Town.

On the same evening.

Qin Lie walked out of the Herb Mountain cave, and when he glanced at the foot of the hill, he saw an elegant shadow standing there — it was Ling Yushi.

She was robed in a close-fitting, navy blue dress, and it brought out her aura of quiet elegance completely. Her long, jet black hair was let loose like plunging waterfalls, and it only added to her beauty and nobility.

Under the sunset, she was like a fairy who had walked right out of a painting, fascinating the masses and swaying their hearts.

“Why are you here today?” Qin Lie walked over and asked naturally.

“My father has arranged for a feast and allowed me to invite you personally. In hopes that you would bless us with your presence.” Ling Yushi smiled gently with eyes full of meaning. “For the past few days, there were quite the number of gorgeous little birds in Ling Family surrounding your stone house. I couldn’t even find the chance to meet you…”

Qin Lie couldn’t suppress a laugh and shook his head as he said in a helpless tone, “This is exactly what I was afraid of.”

After he had truly awakened, he still chose to disguise himself as a silent fool exactly because he was afraid of attracting the Ling Family’s attention and unnecessary troubles which would affect his own training.

Now, the moment he appeared in Ling Town, all the clansmen would lock eyes with him and pester him with lots of questions along the way. Even after he had gone back to his home, he couldn’t find peace and escape from the endless chatter surrounding him. Sometimes Ling Xiao and Ling Xing would even straight up barge into his home for a talk and a drink.

And now, even Ling Chengzhi had begun preparing a feast. Suddenly, he was afraid that he would lose his quiet days forever.

“You don’t have to worry too much; their enthusiasm will settle down eventually. Just wait and it’ll soon be over,” Ling Yushi

consoled him and then continued apologetically, “It’s all because of me that your life was disrupted. I’ve dragged you into that big mess in the Ling Family…”

Qin Lie smiled coolly, “It’s not all because of you. When the Du Family tried to sneak in their artificer to crack Herb Mountain’s formation, they also offended me. I did not feel like allowing them to have a good time either.”

“Oh you. What is your true realm; at which level of Refinement are you at now? That Du Heng is at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm and he didn’t even stand a chance. Your realm level must be pretty high, am I right?” Ling Yushi bowed slightly and stuck herself towards him. She held his gaze, unwavering, with a pair of starry eyes.

Right now, Ling Yushi was slightly taller than him, so after she lowered her waist like that, her plump lips were but a fist’s distance away…

A subtle fragrance that refreshed the heart slipped silently out of her breathing lips, causing Qin Lie’s heart to sway a little as an unknown flame burned inside him…

“Seventh level of Refinement, I am only at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Mn, seventh level of the Refinement Realm.” Even his speech was getting a little clumsy.

Ling Yushi stared deeply at his face before breaking into giggle, her eyes filled with laughter. “Like I’d believe you.”

“Either you believe it or forget about it.” Qin Lie chuckled himself. “My acupoints are filled with a different energy, so spirit energy cannot seep inside them. Since I can’t penetrate my acupoints, I’m at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, isn’t that right?”

“A different energy?” Ling Yushi showed a pondering look as she walked alongside him towards Ling Town, thinking seriously with a frown. After a while, she finally said, “Logically speaking, as long the acupoints are penetrated and can store energy, then it should count as eighth level of Refinement, shouldn’t it? Even if it isn’t spirit energy that is inside your acupoints, as long as it’s a form of energy, then it should count as having your acupoints penetrated, and thus be the eighth level of the Refinement…”

After a pause she said, “How about this; we’ll use the Realm Assessing Stone to test this later. We’ll evaluate by the richness of your spirit energy.”

Qin Lie’s thoughts stirred. “If a different kind of energy had penetrated the acupoints, it would still count as the eighth level of Refinement? It doesn’t necessarily have to be spirit energy?”

“That’s right. I heard from father in the past that those who cultivated spirit arts that use a different kind of energy can use that to penetrate their acupoints to make them store special energy. It’s just that this kind of situation is pretty rare and almost unheard of,” Ling Yushi said seriously.

Qin Lie's eyes brightened as he internally nodded before saying, "Not a bad idea. Then let's go and test it using the Realm Assessing Stone."

"First Miss is back."

"Hi there Qin Lie!"

"Haha, First Miss personally went there to wait for Qin Lie. What an enviable person."

"They're engaged, of course they're going to get together. Look at you, fussing over nothing."

When Qin Lie and Ling Yushi appeared at the entrance of Ling Town, there were many Ling clansmen who immediately greeted them loudly while smiling, teasing the duo in good will.

Qin Lie paid her some attention and noticed that Ling Yushi was blushing slightly; there was embarrassment hidden in her eyes. However, she wasn't angry, and she didn't seem to mind the teasing; this made him feel a little surprised.

Enveloped in the crowd's smiles and greetings along the way, the duo arrived at the Ling Family Hall. A table of excellent food had just been arranged, and it was still steaming. The The Ling brothers, Ling Xuanxuan, and even Clan Elder Ling Kangan were also present; the moment they saw him walking over, they were immediately full of smiles and rose to greet them.

“I thought it was about time you guys arrived, so I let the servants prepare this in advance. Ah, Qin Lie, when your grandfather was still around, we would often sit down and eat together. After your grandfather left... I neglected you. It’s Uncle Ling’s fault. Today I will drink three cups of self-punishment!”

Before waiting for Qin Lie to speak, the Ling Family Patriarch grabbed the drinking cup and downed three cups.

“Qin Lie, in the past I... in the past... anyway, I’m at fault so I’ll punish myself with a drink too. Please forgive me.”

Ling Xuanxuan bowed her head and didn’t dare to look at him. A look of shame and regret floated on her face as she too drank her wine and just sat with her head bowed without saying a word.

“Come on, Qin Lie, come over and sit,” Ling Chengzhi invited passionately. “Little Shi, bring Qin Lie in quickly, what are you standing there for?”

Seeing her family member’s enthusiastic flattering, Ling Yushi was a bit embarrassed and said helplessly, “Father, Qin Lie needs to use the Realm Assessing Stone for a while to check his level. Maybe we can drink later.”

“I’ll get it!”

Ling Chengzhi stood up abruptly, blazed out and into the hall,

and then placed a diamond-shaped Realm Assessing Stone in front of Qin Lie.

"Thank you."

Qin Lie was extremely concerned about his level, so he did not care that the whole Ling Family was around and pressed his palm to the stone. Slowly, he injected his spirit energy into the Realm Assessing Stone.

Rays of blue light floated from the Realm Assessing Stone. The first six rays were really quick, and when it reached the seventh ray, it noticeably slowed down.

The Ling Family members watched the Realm Assessing Stone's blue light attentively. Each ray represented a level of Refinement, and now they had reached the seventh, blue light...

Qin Lie continued to increase the transfer of spirit energy, his eyes completely glued to the Realm Assessing Stone's surface. As the spirit energy grew stronger, another blue light emerged, albeit very thin and blurry at the beginning. But as time went by, it gradually turned brighter and brighter!

"The eighth level of the Refinement Realm!" Ling Yushi exclaimed in pleasant surprise. "I told you, didn't I? You must have reached the eighth level of Refinement, but you didn't believe it yourself. I really don't know what else to say to you."

On the other hand, Ling Chengye and the others were completely nonplussed about the fact. In their opinion, since Qin Lie was able to take down Du Heng perfectly without any chance of retaliation, it was only natural that he should be at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm. It wasn't a surprise to them at all, but what did surprise them, was Ling Yushi's exclamation. "Isn't that very normal?" Ling Chengye asked for the reason.

Ling Yushi proceeded to explain Qin Lie's worries.

Ling Chengye was surprised at first. Then he turned towards Qin Lie and said, "No matter what kind of energy, as long as it could penetrate the acupoints and be discharged from it, then it will be considered as the eighth level of the Refinement Realm. In fact, from what I know, those spirit arts that could open acupoints through a different kind of energy are usually incredibly rare and amazing..."

Qin Lie finally relaxed after seeing the eighth blue light on the Realm Assessing Stone and listening to Ling Chengye's explanation.

After he pulled back his hand, the blue light on top of the Realm Assessing Stone quickly disappeared. Looking at the Realm Assessing Stone, that was as smooth as a mirror, he thought to himself with eyes that shone with a thoughtful look.

"I've only used the spirit energy inside my dantian's spirit sea. This alone is enough to be called the eighth level of the Refinement Realm, and I haven't used even a shred of the thunder and lightning energy stored inside my acupoints. If... if I used all the

thunder and lightning energy in my seven hundred and twenty acupoints and injected them into the stone, I wonder what would happen…”

When he had battled Du Heng, he had thought that the reason Du Heng could not withstand even a single blow was because he had underestimated himself and did not use his full power. He thought that it was because his electric net had taken down the spirit bird released by the Golden Spirit Bird which then caused Du Heng to be caught off guard and suffer a complete collapse to the point that even his mind was intimidated. He had believed that all these factors combined was the reason that he had been struck away in a single blow.

But it was only now that he finally understood that it wasn’t that Du Heng didn’t give it his all, it’s just that he was really strong to begin with!

—He had underestimated his own true power!

So he had reached the eighth level of the Refinement Realm before he even realized it. With an equivalent realm to Du Heng and the extra power from his thunder and lightning energy, plus the strength of his own physical body, it was practically a given that he would utterly defeat Du Heng!

……

Chapter 50: Back Figure

At the banquet table.

The Ling Family was enthusiastically treating Qing Lie, continuously urging him to drink to thank him for the things he had done for all of them.

After Ling Xuanxuan drank a few cups, she gradually eased up and she gazed curiously at Qin Lie with bright eyes. She suddenly seemed to be brimming with interest in him.

“Don’t drink anymore!” Ling Yushi shouted to curb everyone’s enthusiasm so they would stop drinking.

Ling Chengye’s face was flushed as he chuckled and said with a nod, “Alright, no more drinking, no more drinking.”

“Uncle Ling, I’d like to ask about my grandpa.” At this time, Qin Lie put down his drinking cup and suddenly asked, “You had once said that you and my grandfather frequently conversed… what did he talk about with you, where did he go?”

Ling Chengye’s expression was strange. A beat later, he sighed and said, “Qin Lie, Uncle Ling will not lie to you, I do not understand your grandfather at all. What I said at the engagement ceremony was to deal with the Du Family, all of it was false. I’m not familiar with your grandfather at all. Even though you are asking me, I have no idea know how to answer.”

The reason that Qin Lie had come over with Ling Yushi, other than to use the Realm Assessing Stone, was that he hoped he could learn where his grandfather had gone from Ling Chengye. He hadn't expected to receive this kind of result after eating and drinking. This caused his mood to instantly plummet.

"My grandpa left a letter for me telling me that he was going to be gone for a few years and would return when I turned seventeen. If he has not come back by then, then he most likely had an accident... I do not know much about my grandpa's situation, but I hope nothing bad happened to him," Qin Lie said with his head bowed.

The Ling brothers and Ling Kangan looked at each other and saw the shock on each other's faces.

Qin Shan's passing away two years ago had been very suspicious. When Ling Chengye found the strange formation inside Herb Mountain, he had guessed that Qin Shan could have possibly faked his death. Now, he had finally confirmed it due to Qin Lie's words. This shocked them, causing them to feel that Qin Lie and his grandfather Qin Shan were not simple in the least.

"Qin Lie, you... why were you and your grandfather at Ling Town? Where were you before?" Ling Chengye asked.

"Don't know, I don't know." Qin Lie shook his head, and a forlorn and disappointed expression surfaced on his face. "I do not have any memories from before I was ten years old. Starting from

where I do have memories, I had come to Ling Town with Grandpa and then spent the next few years in a dazed cultivation state. I also want to find my grandpa and understand the situation."

Seeing Qin Lie's current expression, Ling Yushi's heart suddenly hurt. She stood and said, "Let's end it here tonight. Qin Lie, you must be tired, I'll accompany you back."

Qin Lie was very disappointed since he had not been able to learn anything from Ling Chengye. He did not linger and left expressionlessly, with his heart heavy as he walked together with Ling Yushi.

Ling Yushi feared he had drank too much. She threw an arm over his shoulders as she walked with him in the darkness towards his stone house.

Under the clear moonlight, the shadows of the two lengthened and then seemed to merge together...

At the door, Ling Chengye watched as the two walked away with an odd glint in his eyes.

Ling Chengzhi had a slight smile as he said thoughtfully, "Little Shi seems to have gradually forgotten that the engagement between her and Qin Lie... is just a scheme to stall for time. When Qin Lie turns seventeen, Big Brother, you and Qin Lie can end this engagement unilaterally. After three more months, Qin Lie will be sixteen..."

Ling Chengye was astounded, and then he furrowed his brows. He remained silent and did not say anything.

Ling Xuanxuan stood at the side. Looking at the two shadows that had melded together, a thought suddenly rose in her mind: If I hadn't opposed it, then the person that would be walking with Qin Lie right now wouldn't be Big Sister, but me...

Thinking like this, helplessness and pain rose within, causing her to suffocate as if there had been a blockage in her heart.

"Chengye, Qin Lie is actually a good child, and he has helped the Ling Family multiple times. He also seems to be interested in Little Shi. I feel his marriage with Little Shi... there is no harm if it turns into a real one, what do you think?" Ling Family' Clan Elder Ling Kangan smiled slightly and said, "There are only a few of us who know the details. If we do not oppose this, I think this matter will be completed."

"Sigh, everything about Qin Lie is good, but his origins are unknown... I'm afraid that it will cause great trouble in the future." Ling Chengye was very worried.

He didn't know why Qin Shan and Qin Lie had hidden themselves in Ling Town, but this grandfather and grandson pair were definitely not simple; they may even have great origins.

But the Ling Family was just a little force and could not afford to deal with trouble. If Qin Lie and Ling Yushi's marriage caused the Ling Family to land in a calamitous situation, how could he face

the members of the Ling Family?

As the leader of the family, he had to consider all factors and try as much as he could to help the clan avoid future dangers. He needed to be extremely careful.

“Your concern is reasonable. We’ll talk about this more based on the situation, so let it progress naturally.” Ling Kangan thought about it again and his heart also cooled slightly. He understood that Ling Chengye’s caution was necessary.

……

“Really, my dad had to urge you to drink. He thinks you are the same as them, hmph.”

In the stone house, Ling Yushi helped Qin Lie back and complained that her father should not have allowed Qin Lie to drink so much wine as she entered the house.

“Rest first, I’ll help you get water for a bath. You as well, don’t drink if you don’t want to. They can’t force you, can they?” Ling Yushi reminded him. When Qin Lie sat down, she went to the washroom to open the tap. “Don’t worry too much about your grandfather. Nothing will happen to him, and he’ll definitely come back to Ling Town when you turn seventeen, so rest your heart.”

Qin Lie sighed lightly. He shook his head and didn’t know what to say.

“Qin Lie, I think... something must have happened when you were young. You might have temporarily lost your memories, but you might suddenly remember them at some time. Then you can find your parents and discover where your relatives are.” In the washroom, Ling Yushi’s tone was gentle as she comforted him.

For an unknown reason, as he listened to her gentle and soft voice, his worries gradually disappeared. The depressed mood caused by the alcohol started to ease.

“I’ve let out the water.”

Ling Yushi, walking out of the washroom, had a slight smile, but her eyes seemed slightly dejected.

“I’m going to leave first. Have a slow bath, and remember not to get cold.” Her head was lowered, and when she arrived at the doorway, she said with her back facing Qin Lie, “You have so many contribution points in Nebula Pavilion and the Nebula Token. You can instantly become a core member of Nebula Pavilion at any time. If you cultivate at Nebula Pavilion, it will definitely be much faster than here at the Ling Family... if you want to go to Nebula Pavilion, then go. That place is more suitable for your growth.”

When she finished, Ling Yushi’s back figure was lonely as she left through the door.

Qin Lie was astounded, and it took a moment for him to react. A long while after she had disappeared, he shook his head and

laughed, “Stupid, if I wanted to go, I would have left long ago, why would I wait until now…”

The second day in the caves of Herb Mountain.

Qin Lie woke up from his cultivation. He used his mind consciousness to enter the Soul Suppression Orb to gaze at the complex and mysterious spirit diagrams on the walls and to look at the lines upon lines of bright flashing spirit lines.

The thickness of every spirit line was not the same and represented different degrees of spirit energy. They caused him to suddenly remember his grandpa’s words.

The inscription of spirit diagrams required very precise control over spirit energy. When each spirit line takes form, the spirit energy used needed to be extremely precise. A spirit diagram could have thousands of spirit lines, and the length and width of each line were not exactly proportional to the amount of spirit energy used. If one spirit line was incorrect, the entire spirit diagram’s inscription would be a waste of effort.

A spirit artifact would sometimes require several spirit diagrams to be layered and merged together. This demanded even more control of spirit lines, and it demanded precision to be maintained at an extremely terrifying degree. One bit of carelessness was a calamity, and it was very likely for the spirit artifact to be turned to scrap at but a moment’s notice.

“The spirit diagram is imprinted in the mind, but in order to be

inscribed, it requires extreme precision! Those spirit lines of varied thickness and brightness represent a special inscribing method, like techniques and art formulas. If one only knows techniques and does not understand the matching art formula, they cannot express its true power…”

Visualizing the four spirit diagrams in his mind, Qin Lie thought in silence and gradually found the trick.

Today, he had completely memorized the four Spirit Gathering, Amplification, Spirit Storage, and Strengthening spirit diagrams. He knew that what he memorized was just the “technique.”

In order to truly inscribe them, he still needed to master the precise width and length of the spirit lines and know how much spirit energy was in each line. This would require repeated practice and not just visualizing as in the past.

“Practice, practice, practicing inscribing spirit diagrams requires special ‘spirit tablets.’ I do not have ‘spirit tablets’ to practice with, so it seems I need to think of a way…” Qin Lie rubbed his chin as he thought, “Grandpa is an artificer, so I should also become an artificer like Grandpa and one day make a wondrous spirit artifact like the wooden carving. If Grandpa comes back and finds that I can already inscribe spirit diagrams, he would be… delighted, right?”

In the evening, he came out of Herb Mountain and was in deep thought all the way until he reached Ling Town.

In the dining hall, he ate dinner with the Ling Family; he found that Ling Yushi's mood was slightly depressed compared to usual, and her smile was slightly forced.

"I need 'spirit tablets' to practice spirit diagrams inscription, where can I get them?" Qin Lie suddenly asked.

"Spirit tablets to inscribe spirit diagrams..." Ling Chengye was shocked. "They have to be made from special materials. The Ling Family doesn't have the wealth to foster artificers, so we naturally do not have these kind of objects. Some of the material shops in Icestone City should have spirit tablets, and Nebula Pavilion naturally does too. Oh, right, you have Nebula Pavilion contribution points, so you can trade for them at Nebula Pavilion."

Qin Lie's eyes lit up.

"Nebula Pavilion..." Ling Yushi's eyes dimmed as she thought: As expected, he has decided to go.

Thinking like this, she suddenly felt that the usually delicious food tasted the same as wax.

"Uncle Ling, I am not planning to go to Nebula Pavilion in the short term, I need to wait here in Ling Town for my grandpa to come back. Can you get someone to go to Nebula Pavilion and exchange some of my contribution points for spirit tablets for me?" Qin Lie thought and then asked with a smile.

“Of course,” Ling Chengye instantly agreed. “This is very simple. I’ll let someone use my name to go to Nebula Pavilion. As long as they recognize your contribution points, it will be easy to acquire spirit tablets, it isn’t troublesome at all.”

“Thanks, Uncle Ling,” Qin Lie said.

He then looked at Ling Yushi and found that Ling Yushi’s beautiful eyes were flashing brightly as though they had suddenly became alert. She also smiled sweetly at him, and that beautiful action — struck him and plucked at his heartstrings.

Chapter 51: Practice

Icestone City, Nebula Pavilion.

Ling Feng and Liu Yan stood before Elder Han Qingrui with slightly restrained expressions.

Following the Ling Family Patriarch's orders, Ling Feng had come to Nebula Pavilion to help Qin Lie obtain "spirit tablets" in order to practice inscribing spirit diagrams.. Because he was unfamiliar with Nebula Pavilion, he first sought out Liu Yan and asked him to be his guide.

At Celestial Wolf Mountain, Liu Yan had become very close to the Ling Family and had also expressed his sincerest gratitude towards them, telling them that if they required any assistance at Nebula Pavilion, they should seek him out.

Ling Feng's arrival caused Liu Yan to be elated. He happily guided Ling Feng to find Han Qingrui and had Ling Feng explain the situation.

"Qin Lie and Ling Lie are are one and the same, and he possesses three thousand contribution points. The 'spirit tablets' that Nebula Pavilion uses to inscribe spirit diagrams are worth five contribution points each. How many do you want to buy on Qin Lie's behalf?" asked Han Qingrui. He thought,smiled slightly, then inquired "That Qin Lie, is he also an artificer? Spirit tablets can only be used to practice inscribing spirit diagrams, they are just basic materials and have no other purpose. He really only wants to

get spirit tablets?”

“Elder Han, during our time at Celestial Wolf Mountain, Qin Lie helped fix my Hexagonal Shield,” Liu Yan explained with a smile.

Han Qingrui nodded with shock visible in his eyes and said, “So that’s how it is.”

“How about a hundred spirit tablets?” Ling Feng suggested.

“Mn, of course, that will be five hundred contribution points. Let me record this, and with that, Qin Lie now has two thousand and five hundred contribution points remaining.” Han Qingrui drew a few strokes on the account book and then gave a piece of paper to Ling Feng. “Take this receipt to the Spirit Materials Stockroom to receive them. Liu Yan can lead you there.”

“Thanks, Elder Han,” Ling Feng gave his thanks.

Han Qingrui waved his hand and said casually, “Actually, Qin Lie can come to Nebula Pavilion to cultivate whenever he would like. He does not have to stay with the Ling Family. My son often speaks of him and hopes that he will come soon. Mn, please pass on my son, Han Feng’s greetings.”

“I will,” Ling Feng said seriously.

“I didn’t think that Qin Lie was acquainted with Tu Ze, Kang Ze and the others. This boy really conceals himself thoroughly.”

Exiting the room, Liu Yan smiled and shook his head. “Qin Lie, Ling Lie, haha, he clearly could have become a core member of Nebula Pavilion long ago, why is he still staying at your Ling Town? Isn’t entering Nebula Pavilion and becoming a core disciple the goal that all the young martial practitioners of the families dream about?”

“I don’t know what he’s thinking,” replied Ling Feng with a grimace. “For Ling Xin, Ling Xiao, and myself, breaking through to the Natal Opening Realm before twenty years old and entering Nebula Pavilion is our only goal. If I had the chance, I would move to Nebula Pavilion immediately since the environment here is more suitable for cultivation…”

“You will definitely be able to enter in the future.” Liu Yan patted his shoulder.

“Mn!” Ling Feng nodded heavily.

……

“Strange, Qin Lie is clearly able to enter Nebula Pavilion to cultivate, so why would he remain in Ling Town?” At the dining table, Ling Chengzhi’s brows knitted together and said, “If he wants to wait for Qin Shan to come back, he can wait at Nebula Pavilion. With the Ling Family present, we can notify him immediately if Qin Shan returns. He doesn’t have to stay at the Ling Family.”

“Maybe it is because of Big Sister?” Ling Xuanxuan’s brows

moved slightly and she suddenly turned to Ling Yushi beside her. “Right, Big Sister? That guy can clearly leave Ling Town and have a better place to cultivate, but he just happens to want to stay. It’s for Big Sister, right?”

Ling Yushi seemed to be thinking of something. Hearing her sister ask, her face blushed red, and her bright eyes flashed as she said in a panic, “I don’t know, that’s probably not the case. I don’t know too much about what he is thinking...” As she spoke, her heart sweetened, and the two circles of red on her cheeks became even brighter.

“Look at you, still saying it isn’t for you? Who are you fooling?” Ling Xuanxuan pouted and said furiously, “It’s so strange, Qin Lie is the same age as me, but I will have to call him brother-in-law in the future. Really, I’m suddenly his junior, this is horrid!”

“What brother-in-law. You silly little girl, you only know how to speak nonsense, see if I don’t tear your mouth apart!” Ling Yushi was furious, her face red as she quarreled with her younger sister. She scolded but her eyes were full of mirth.

“You’re both already of marriageable age, but you’re still fooling around. Act properly!” Ling Chengye snorted lightly.

The sisters heard his scolding, smiled, and obediently stopped.

Ling Chengye’s brows furrowed slightly. He made a sound and suddenly said, “Shi’er, have you forgotten that the engagement between you and Qin Lie... is just a stop-gap measure? When Qin

Lie turns seventeen, Father and Qin Lie will be able to end the engagement unilaterally. Your engagement is not real…”

Ling Yushi’s eyes dimmed. She suddenly dropped her head and said in a cold tone, “I remember.”

Ling Chengye nodded and sighed. He continued, “Even though Qin Lie has helped our Ling Family greatly and I like the child, his origins are unknown. We do not know his background, nor do we know how many secrets he is hiding. Father… is very worried, worried that some of his affairs will create trouble for the Ling Family. Sigh, I am also torn and cannot make a decision. I just want to remind you to not completely commit too deeply.”

When the words came out, the table full of Ling Family members became silent.

A moment later, Ling Yushi slowly stood and said with a lowered head, “I’m full.”

She walked straight out of the dining hall.

“Daddy, you’re worrying for nothing! Really, it’s rare for Big Sister to be happy, and now she’s bothered by your words!” Ling Xuanxuan abruptly put down her plate and glared at Ling Chengye. She said, “If Qin Lie is truly stupid, I would be the first to object to him and Big Sister. I’ll stop it even if it costs me my life so Big Sister does not have to endure that humiliation!”

She paused and then shouted, “But Qin Lie is clearly very smart, his cultivation realm is not weak, and he has helped the Ling Family greatly. Even Ling Feng, Ling Xiao, and Ling Xin admires and respects him to a great extent. I, myself, have not endorsed him this the entire time, but I find him to be pretty good now. I just don’t understand. Daddy, why do you have to be so bothersome?”

“Xuanxuan, your father is the patriarch of the family. He needs to consider any potential problem from the perspective of the entire Ling Family.” Ling Chengzhi frowned and lectured, “You only go with what makes you happy at the time, simply reacting honestly to everything and without thinking. You don’t consider the potential consequences or how your actions will influence the entire family—but your father cannot be like this. The Ling Family… is just a very tiny clan and cannot weather too much storm. Even the slightest bit of turbulence can destroy the Ling Family and cause it to disappear entirely.”

As soon as he finished saying these meaningful words, the Patriarch of the Ling Family lightly sighed, his face full of bitterness and helplessness.

“Dad, I was impudent,” apologetically said Ling Xuanxuan after she had reflected. “I just feel that Qin Lie isn’t a bad person. Because I had a biased opinion towards him before, I feel very guilty. I saw how he helped the Ling Family so many times for Big Sister, so…”

“Daddy understands, Daddy understands. Actually, I feel that Qin Lie isn’t bad either, but, but… sigh, if he was just a normal person,

Daddy wouldn't have to worry and would allow him and Shishi to be together. Let's not think too much on this, the more I think, the more my head hurts. Let's wait and see," Ling Chengye stated his attitude.

.....

One hundred spirit tablets were neatly placed in the broad cave of Herb Mountain. The spirit tablets were only palm-sized, mostly made from unique stone materials, and the surface was smooth and regular, able to reflect just like a mirror.

There was also a batch of spirit tablets made from wood. There were natural wood grains on the surface, so it was rough to the touch.

Low grade spirit tablets could only be inscribed with low grade spirit diagrams. The materials used did not have to be the same; wood, stone, bones, and even special leaves could be made into spirit tablets.

There was only one use for spirit tablets—to practice spirit diagram inscription. It was a one-use object. One spirit tablet could only be used to practice inscribing one spirit diagram. Whether or not inscription was successful, the spirit tablet could not be used again.

The one hundred spirit tablets cost five hundred contribution points and were delivered by Ling Feng from Nebula Pavilion for him to practice spirit diagram inscription.

Separating the spirit tablets based on the material, Qin Lie was slightly excited, and he used both of his hands to caress the spirit tablet to feel the texture and using his heart to feel...

A long while later, he slowly adjusted his heart rate and breathing, focusing and calming down to refine his spirit energy.

His left hand's index finger made contact with a stone spirit tablet. A needle-like energy lit up on his fingertip as he carefully moved it along the spirit tablet.

The spirit tablet was the paper, the needle energy at his fingertip was the pen, and the spirit energy was the ink...

His attention was unprecedentedly focused, his mind and consciousness permeating inside the spirit tablet; he seemed to see a snowy-white piece of paper.

As his spirit energy entered, a white dot of light appeared on the paper. That was the gathering of spirit energy, the beginning of everything!

As the white dot of light moved, flashing lines were gradually drawn out on the "white paper" inside the spirit tablet... seeing the spirit lines appear, he suddenly felt excitement and, his calm heart was disturbed.

"Snap!"

His fingertip shook minutely, and he suddenly lost control of his spirit energy. The spirit line he had worked so hard to draw snapped like a split piece of rope. The white light sprayed out and completely ruined the clean and white “paper.”

One spirit tablet was now ruined.

Qin Lie forlornly took away his finger with a face full of disappointment. He murmured, “Five contribution points gone just like this…”

Any slight change in his state of mind could cause his hand to tremble and his spirit energy to go out of control!

Taking a deep breath, he took out a new spirit tablet, put his finger on it, and tried to inscribe the Spirit Gathering diagram from his Soul Suppressing Orb etched deep within his memories.

A long while later, he had just finished inscribing the third spirit line and caused another spirit tablet to turn to scrap because his spirit energy control for one of the spirit lines had been wrong.

The Spirit Gathering diagram in his mind was formed from thousands of spirit lines crossing one another. He had just begun, and he had failed once again.

“Five contribution points lost again. This artificer practice is really just burning money.”

Qin Lie furrowed his brow. He finally understood why the Ling Family did not have the wealth to nurture artificers, because the growth of an artificer required an astonishing investment of spirit materials, spirit stone, and spirit herbs. Small forces basically could not afford it.

After sighing over it, he once again took another spirit tablet and continued to practice inscribing spirit diagrams.

Chapter 52: To Keep Up With Your Footsteps

Many scrap spirit tablets had been scattered around him, and each spirit tablet showed marks of failure. Some of the stone tablets were fragmented into pieces while some of the wood tablets were scorched as they seemed to be laughing at him.

Beside his left hand were more than twenty untouched and mirror-like stone spirit tablets.

“Snap!”

A piercing explosion came from the wooden spirit tablet on his hand, and a gust of thick smoke erupted. The spirit diagram had cracked, and the spirit tablet once again turned to scrap.

“Seventy-eighth tablet…”

The corner of Qin Lie’s mouth was full of bitterness, and looking at the burned spirit tablet, he helplessly shook his head.

This month, other than the times when there was lightning and he bitterly cultivated Heavenly Thunder Eradication, he would focus the remainder of his energy on practicing spirit diagram inscription.

In the beginning, he would quickly cause a spirit tablet to be

scrapped due to tiny mistakes.

In just the first week, more than forty spirit tablets were quickly used up and turned to scrap.

That was when he had been completely unfamiliar with inscribing spirit diagrams. It was where he had wasted the most spirit tablets while gaining the least progress in developing his inscribing skills.. Frequently, he would only inscribe a few spirit lines before suddenly failing and turning the spirit tablet to scrap.

As he continued to practice and failed again and again, he gradually discovered the trick to inscribing spirit lines...

His amateur mistakes gradually decreased over time, and the rate at which he used spirit materials visibly slowed.

He started to be able to get the spirit lines to intersect, but out of ten intersections, on average, eight of them would be failures.

The occasional successes would later on fail due to a mistake in the succeeding spirit line intersection which would cause the spirit diagram inscription to break apart.

The Spirit Gathering diagram was formed from thousands of spirit lines criss-crossing one another and were extremely complex and profound.

During the process of inscription, any mistake, no matter how

elementary or minuscule, would render all previous efforts worthless and would leave only the bitter taste of failure.

In this month, he had gone from complete ignorance to slight familiarity, so now he was able to avoid many elementary mistakes.

From using turning one spirit tablet to scrap every ten minutes to one a day and from only being able to draw out a few spirit lines at once to being able to draw a simple diagram of hundreds of spirit lines intersecting one another...

He was improving bit by bit.

However, he still had yet to succeed even once and was still relatively far away from success.

The Spirit Gathering diagram was composed of two thousand three hundred and fifty seven lines crossing together. In his best attempt, he had inscribed over six hundred spirit lines on the spirit tablet.

In other words, his best try was only successfully inscribing one-fourth of the entire Spirit Gathering diagram.

Success was very far away, but he had pretty much used up all the spirit tablets. Looking at the rate of consumption, the remaining spirit tablets would not last until he could successfully inscribe the Spirit Gathering diagram...

“As expected, without great perseverance, without the bravery to endure failure, and without being able to avoid delusions of grandeur, becoming an Artificer is extremely difficult.” Sitting in the center of a room full of scrap spirit tablets, Qin Lie’s brows knitted, but his eyes were flashing. “I hadn’t expected that practicing spirit diagram inscription would actually be very beneficial for my cultivation; this is an unexpected gain.”

In the previous month, he had put all his energy into practicing inscribing spirit diagrams. He had originally assumed that it would affect his cultivation realm, however, he found that not only was inscribing spirit diagrams not detrimental to the growth of his spirit energy, it instead raised both his spirit and mind energy. This made him extremely surprised and overjoyed.

Inscribing spirit diagrams did not just require a continuous expenditure of spirit energy but mind energy as well. He needed to precisely control spirit energy when he was extremely alert and use his mind to grasp the slight changes in the spirit diagram...

Each second of this dramatically consumed both his mind consciousness and spirit energy.

He would quickly expend all the spirit energy in his dantian’s spirit sea, and his mind would become exhausted. Whenever this happened, he would temporarily pause his inscription of the spirit diagram and use spirit stones to replenish both his spirit energy and mind energy in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility.

When he recovered, he would always find his mind was refreshed and his spirit energy had become pure and abundant.

“After the spirit sea in the dantian and mind consciousness are completely exhausted, the new round of replenishing and recovery was able to cause spirit and mind energy to receive differing amounts of growth!”

He had made such a conclusion after going through the process multiple times. He then paid close attention and truly found proof that this conclusion was accurate.

Maybe it was that while practicing inscribing spirit diagrams did not affect his cultivation level, it still caused his spirit and mind energy to grow, so even though he failed time and time again, causing numerous spirit tablets to turn to scrap, he still grit his teeth and managed to persist.

“I need to replenish my spirit tablets, soon there won’t be enough.” After thinking for a while, he walked out of the mountain cave and headed towards Ling Town.

In this period of time, he had essentially been cultivating day and night in Herb Mountain’s cave, eating and sleeping there. His occasional returns to Ling Town was only to get food supplies, and then he would spend a few more days without going outside.

Ling Yushi had also been working hard recently. In the multiple trips he made to Ling Town, Ling Yushi was also in a state of cultivation, so the two did not meet up.

Today, he returned to Ling Town in the evening and finally saw Ling Yushi on the dinner table when he ate with the Ling Family.

Not having seen each other for a month, Ling Yushi seemed slightly slimmer, but her mental state was very good, and her eyes were bright when they were opened. It seemed that her spirit energy had a substantial increase recently.

“Why do you make yourself so weak?” Seeing him come over, Ling Yushi said with distress, “When martial practitioners cultivate, they need the nourishment of food the most. Otherwise, their bodies cannot endure it. You cannot stay inside Herb Mountain every day, you need to come out for frequent walks. At least, you need to sunbathe in the day.

“Mn, I will pay attention.” Qin Lie smiled.

He then said to Ling Chengye, “Uncle Ling, can I trouble you to send someone to Nebula Pavilion to help obtain three hundred more spirit tablets for me.”

“Another three hundred spirit tablets? That would use up a thousand and five hundred contribution points. This many contribution points is enough to exchange for a pretty good spirit artifact.” Ling Chengye had a shocked expression as he sincerely continued, “Qin Lie, I will remind you that it is very hard to become an Artificer. The growth of an Artificer requires such an unimaginable pile of spirit stones.”

“I understand.” Qin Lie nodded.

He knew what Ling Chengye said was not an exaggeration. Even such a force like Nebula Pavilion could only support common rank artificers. Even Nebula Pavilion did not have the ability to support artificers of higher rank.

Nebula Pavilion would not be able to even support the spirit materials needed to develop a profound rank artificer which was only one level higher.

“Without support from a powerful force, Artificers cannot grow. It is just a waste of effort.” Ling Chengye seriously suggested, “It is better to put your efforts into your martial cultivation. Even though martial practitioners also need the support of spirit artifacts, spirit pills, and spirit stones, compared to Artificers, the amounts of resources needed is many times less. Even if martial practitioners did not have those spirit materials, there is the omnipresent nature spirit energy. Leveling up would be much slower, but you can keep cultivating and do not have to rely on material items at all.”

“Mn, if Artificers do not have materials to practice with, they cannot progress at all,” Ling Chengzhi chimed in.

“I understand, I will consider it. But still, exchange for those spirit tablets for me since I don’t know what to use those contribution points for at this point in time,” expressed Qin Lie.

Seeing that he was insistent, Ling Chengye nodded and did not

try to urge him further. He said, “Alright, I will have someone to do it.”

After eating the meal, Qin Lie stood to leave for his stone house.

“I’ve finished eating.” Once he left, Ling Yushi quickly stood up, threw down the words, and followed.

In the night, Qin Lie paced and was unhurried as though he was waiting for something...

“Qin Lie, Gao Yu broke through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm recently and has been admitted into Nebula Pavilion.” Ling Yushi’s voice came from behind him. The beauty naturally walked up to him and matched his pace.

“Aren’t only those who break through to the Natal Opening Realm before turning twenty able to enter Nebula Pavilion?” Qin Lie said with shock.

“That is true, but nothing is ever absolute.” Ling Yushi’s expression was calm, her voice as gentle as water. “In Celestial Wolf Mountain, the Gao Family lost too much. Nebula Pavilion allowed Gao Yu’s early entrance in order to compensate the Gao Family. Of course, it is also because Gao Yu is at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm and just a step away from the Natal Opening Realm. Additionally, he is still young and will definitely be able to break through to Natal Opening Realm before twenty, so he was admitted early.”

“So that is how it is.” Qin Lie nodded.

“Feng Yi’s brother, Feng Kai, secretly left Nebula Pavilion when our people were still at Celestial Wolf Mountain and defected to Shattered Ice Manor. Because one of Feng Yi’s arms was chewed off by a Silver Winged Demon Wolf, Feng Kai recently sent out word that he would definitely kill you, so you should be careful in the future.”

“Only one of Feng Yi’s arm was broken? Pity…” Qin Lie’s brow furrowed slightly. “The Feng Family should be tightly monitored by Nebula Pavilion right now. They definitely would not dare to appear on territory controlled by Nebula Pavilion, so I will not have to worry about him for now.”

The two talked as they walked and reached Qin Lie’s stone hut shortly. Just like usual, Ling Yushi naturally helped him sweep and clean the house and then ran water for his bath.

Qin Lie sat, sprawled out as he watched her move around with a slight smile and continuously detail what had happened recently. He suddenly felt his heart gradually calm down.

“I’ve been working very hard recently, and I will continue work hard on my cultivation. I need to break through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm as soon as possible. I need to enter the Natal Opening Realm as early as possible…”

In the washroom, Ling Yushi shouted as she expressed with great solemnity as though she had made a great decision.

“Why are you suddenly working so hard? I came out a few times this month and didn’t see you…” Qin Lie grumbled.

“The water is ready.” Ling Yushi walked out. Her face dimmed, and her head was lowered as she said in a low voice, “I do not want you to stay in Ling Town forever because of me. I need to break through to the Natal Opening Realm as soon as possible and enter Nebula Pavilion with you. In the future, I hope I can be by your side. I hope I can help you and not… become your burden.”

She suddenly raised her head and looked deeply at Qin Lie, her eyes flashing with a moving light as she said serenely, “You improve too quickly. Your potential and qualities are much too exceptional. If I do not work hard, I will fall further and further behind. I just want… want to keep up with your footsteps.”

……

Chapter 53: The First Success

In the gloomy mountain cave, the dazzling needle on Qin Lie's fingertips moved slightly, and the stone spirit tablet beneath his hand was also filled with light.

Scrapped spirit tablets were strewn messily around him. At this time, his eyes were completely bloodshot, sweat dripping from his forehead as he held an extremely grave expression with deeply furrowed brows.

He focused all his attention on inscribing spirit diagrams, onto that spirit tablet under his palm!

This was number three hundred and seventy six...

Time passed in a flash and another half a year had passed. In this half year, as before, he still forgot to eat or rest as he focused exclusively on inscribing the Spirit Gathering diagram without a moment of inattentiveness.

He had almost used up the three hundred spirit tablets that Ling Feng had brought back. Right now, he only had twenty four spirit tablets remaining that were usable...

His mind consciousness was inside the spirit tablet under his finger, and a dazzling, extremely complex spirit diagram was clearly imprinted in his mind!

This was the most recent spirit tablet that he had personally used seven days to inscribe. Up until now, there hadn't been a single mistake at all!

Over two thousand spirit lines flashed where they crossed like the stars that flashed in the vast galaxies.

Those bright and complex spirit lines were like the trails left behind by the movement of the stars, containing indescribably profoundness and beauty.

On a corner of this complex and mysterious spirit diagram, a blinding dot of light was still moving and drawing out new spirit lines!

That blinding dot of light moved like a intelligent snake, drawing out clear spirit line marks and slowly neared the end of another spirit line. It had to connect with three other spirit lines and form a perfect rectangle.

This rectangle was at the last corner of the spirit diagram, and was the last part of this spirit diagram...

Qin Lie's finger trembled slightly. He felt that his dantian's spirit sea was close to empty, and his mind was starting to float away.

He gritted his teeth and focused all of his mind consciousness to prevent any outside emotions from affecting his inner heart. He controlled the dot of light to slowly move towards the end of

another spirit line.

—Which would complete the entire Spirit Gathering diagram!

The two spirit lines finally met!

“Boom!”

Like countless lanterns lighting at the same time, the enormous spirit diagram suddenly became extremely bright, as thousands of lines completely linked at this moment. The intersections of this complex and mysterious Spirit Gathering diagram were as bright as stars!

As the spirit power flowed, this diagram became alive and filled with a wondrous attraction!

“I succeeded!”

Qin Lie’s voice was hoarse as he collapsed due to the lack of strength, but his eyes were frightening bright.

After taking his hand away, he couldn’t use his mind consciousness to examine the Spirit Gathering diagram. He could only see the faint light exuded by the spirit tablet; the light slowly spread as though it had an indescribable attraction...

A moment later, Qin Lie’s eyes showed shock. He could clearly

feel the spirit energies of the heaven and earth start to move and gather where he was.

More accurately, they were converging towards the palm-sized spirit tablet in front of him as if they were attracted by the light of the spirit tablet...

"...Spirit Gathering diagrams, Spirit Gathering diagrams are able to gather the energy of the heaven and earth. This, this is a true Spirit Gathering Diagram!" Qin Lie's body shook ferociously, his face glowed with shock, and his eyes fill with inexpressible joy and surprise.

His knowledge of Spirit Gathering diagrams came from his grandfather.

Yet, according to his grandfather, the so-called Spirit Gathering diagram only gathered the spirit energy that martial practitioners channeled in, and allowed the spirit energy of the material practitioners to gather inside the "artifact," so that the spirit energy could flow through the "artifact" and therefore cause the spirit energy to go through the other spirit diagrams of the "artifact" to release their power.

His grandfather had never mentioned that the most basic Spirit Gathering diagram could gather the spirit energy of the heavens and earth, and was a spirit artifact that could attract nature spirit energy...

"This unimaginably complex Spirit Gathering diagram has such

wondrous ability, it is able to directly gather the spirit energy of the heavens and earth. This means that it can increase the rate that martial practitioners consume spirit energy to cultivate." Qin Lie looked with his spirit ablaze at the spirit tablet, took a deep breath, and tried to feel it.

A moment later, he found that the light of the spirit tablet did not expand any longer, and the nature spirit energy in the area around him was more than a quarter as strong as before!

This discovery caused him to become very excited.

Martial practitioners that cultivated in places with high nature spirit energy naturally would have a faster cultivation rate than those who cultivated in places with low spirit energy. The more abundant the nature spirit energy, the faster martial practitioners could condense spirit energy. This was a pattern that was eternal and unchanging.

The Spirit Gathering diagram inside the spirit tablet could cause the nature spirit energy around the cultivator to increase by a fourth. This meant that it could increase the rate that martial practitioners absorb and condense spirit energy!

"Such a wondrous Spirit Gathering diagram..."

Qin Lie's eyes became brighter. He rested for a while and then put his hand back on the spirit tablet to feel it with his mind consciousness.

He found that the burst of spirit energy he had channeled into it before was flowing through the spirit lines of the Spirit Gathering diagram, as though it had activated this complex and mysterious diagram and caused the Spirit Gathering diagram to have such wondrous effects.

After a long while, he retracted the spirit energy he had put in, and the the spirit tablet's glow gradually retreated back into the tablet. The additional spirit energy in the surroundings gradually dissipated after losing its constraint...

"Spirit tablets are only the lowest level of spirit materials, they are only used to practice inscribing spirit diagrams and cannot channel the true power of the spirit diagram. If this was not a spirit tablet but a true "artifact," a high level spirit artifact at that, and this complex Spirit Gathering diagram was inscribed into it, what effect would it have?" After everything returned to normal, Qin Lie thought, and then suddenly stilled.

Spirit Gathering, Amplification, Spirit Storage, Strengthening were the four spirit diagrams. Today, he had inscribed the Spirit Gathering diagram successfully for the first time but he had used three hundred and seventy six spirit tablets!

Also, he was completely unable to guarantee that he would still succeed on the first try if he inscribed the Spirit gathering diagram again.

He had not completely mastered the Spirit Gathering diagram. He needed to continue to practice and experiment.

Only when he would succeed between eight to nine times out of ten tries would he have truly grasped this Spirit Gathering diagram. Right now, he was... still far from that.

"As expected, bringing up an Artificer requires the support of a large force and requires the endless expenditure of spirit materials. It is terrifying to just think about it." Qin Lie sighed and then his expression shook. "Grandpa could make the wood sculpture, and the inside of the wood sculpture is made from the perfect merging of several kinds of spirit diagrams."

Thinking about this, he missed Qin Shan even more, and his desire to open the seal inside his mind and find his memories of ten years ago increased.

"I'm sixteen now, there is still one more year left. If Grandpa doesn't come back to find me in an year, where should I go?" Qin Lie was confused inside. He cleaned up simply and walked outside the cave.

It had been a long time since he went outside the cave. When the sun shined down as he walked out, he suddenly felt dizzy and his eyes became extremely dry and sore.

He gradually adjusted after a long while. Then, he recalled that Ling Yushi had once reminded him to come out to walk frequently, sunbathe, and not always stay in the cave.

"I wonder how she has been recently..." A thread of mirth was at

the corner of his mouth.

"Qin Lie!" Ling Feng's voice suddenly came from the base of the mountain. He waved his hand towards the opening of the cave and bellowed loudly, "It's been seven days, you have finally come out!"

Ling Feng's eyes were anxious, and his expression clearly grave. This caused Qin Lie to be astounded. He jumped off the mountainside and quickly came next to Ling Feng, asking, "You were waiting for me?"

Ling Feng nodded and said with a light sigh, "I've waited two days for you."

"What is it?" Qin Lie said in puzzlement.

"Let's talk as we walk." Ling Feng's eyebrows were furrowed as they walked together towards Ling Town, "It is about the matter of you and First Miss."

Qin Lie narrowed his eyes. "What's going on?"

"Two days ago, Granny Jiu of Seven Fiends Valley passed through Ling Town. When she saw First Miss and Second Miss, she liked them very much. She said that First Miss' personality was gentle, and her spirit art and constitution were all water-oriented. Second Miss's personality was fiery and unruly while her spirit art and constitution were both fire-oriented. The two of them, one fire and one water complemented each other, and they are sisters so

they were very suited to a kind of spirit art that she has. Granny Jiu wants to take the two misses as disciples," Ling Feng explained.

"Seven Fiends Valley? What kind of place is that?" Qin Lie asked with creased brows.

"Seven Fiends Valley is a Black Iron force at the same rank as Dark Asura Hall, a whole rank above Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor!" Ling Feng's expression was respectful and fearful. "The Seven Fiends Valley is composed of seven valleys: Mystical Fiend Valley, Dark Fiend Valley, Gold Fiend Valley, Wood Fiend Valley, Water Fiend Valley, Fire Fiend Valley, and Earth Fiend Valley. Seven Fiends Valley and Dark Asura Hall are friendly, and the private relationships between high ranking martial practitioners of the two forces are also very good. Granny Jiu's true name is Jiu Liuyu. She is a true Netherpasssage Realm expert! And is also the Valley Master of Dark Fiend Valley, ranked second within Seven Fiends Valley!"

Qin Lie's heart felt slightly cold. After being silent for a while, he said, "Isn't it a good thing that she wants to take the two misses as disciples? Does the patriarch not agree?"

"The Seven Fiends Valley that is stronger force than Nebula Pavilion, and Granny Jiu, a Netherpassage expert who is also Valley Master of Dark Fiend Valley, wants to take the two misses as disciples... the Patriarch can't even dream of something this good. He is so happy he has almost forgotten everything, how could he not agree?"

Ling Feng also had a dreaming expression. "To enter Seven

Fiends Valley to cultivate, it is something we do not even dare to think about. For the two misses, it is taking one step and going into heaven. They have skipped right past Nebula Pavilion. If this was any other person... they probably would not be able to reject the temptation."

"That is true, it is a hard-to-reject temptation," Qin Lie said indifferently.

"But First Miss refused..." Ling Feng said with a grimace.

Qin Lie's eyes flashed with an odd light, and looked deeply at Ling Feng. "Why?"

"Granny Jiu heard that First Miss has an engagement. She said... she needs First Miss to be pure, and does not want her constrained by the engagement. She wants to end First Miss' engagement, and she also said that when they go to Seven Fiends Valley, it would be very difficult to return to Ling Town, so the two misses have to consider clearly," Ling Feng said.

Qin Lie was silent.

"Also, Granny Jiu said that she would take the two together, or not take any of them at all." Ling Feng's expression was strange. "But right now, First Miss ignored the Patriarch's lectures, the urgings of Clan Elder and Third Master, and will not agree. Granny Jiu gave a deadline of three days. She said that after three days, if First Miss still will not agree, she would not use force, and will leave Ling Town."

Pausing, Ling Feng added, “Tomorrow is the deadline. For this matter, the Patriarch has almost gone crazy from waiting.”

……

Chapter 54: Parting

While he walked on the small mountain path and listened to Ling Feng's recount, Qin Lie's heart was like an overturned cruet. Sour, sweet, bitter, salty, spicy – they were all mingled into one.

Just half a year ago, when Ling Yushi learned that he held a Nebula Token and could become a core member of Nebula Pavilion at any time, she was even worried for quite a while. In order to avoid becoming his shackles, Ling Yushi had completely in submerged herself in cultivation, in hopes that one day she could keep up and join Nebula Pavilion with him.

Ling Yushi once said that she hoped that she wasn't left too far behind, and that she hoped to keep up with his footsteps...

But half a year later, while he was still cultivating in Ling Town, Ling Yushi had met a once in a lifetime chance to skip right over Nebula Pavilion and enter Seven Fiends Valley straight away, a force of Black Iron rank.

Such was the way of life; Qin Lie wasn't sure if he should cry or laugh, and for a moment he felt terribly upset.

"The Patriarch is waiting for you at the town entrance." Ling Feng said suddenly.

Surprised, Qin Lie immediately saw Ling Chengye at the town entrance. His cheekbones were sunken and his face was pale white. He was staring blankly towards the sky, and from time to time he

would let out a deep sigh.

Southeast of Ling Town, at the courtyard where Du Jiaolan and the family once stayed was an extravagant carriage made out of white jade. The carriage was carved with fine curlicue and embedded with gems and pearls. Under the sun's rays, the blinding reflection from it made even Qin Lie's eyes feel vaguely painful.

There were four Golden Crag Beasts used to pull the carriage with silver chains attached to them, guarding beside the carriage commandingly. These were wild Rank Two spirit beasts, yet they were now all completely docile.

There were a couple of beautiful female martial practitioners scattered about the carriage. Their aura was hidden – their realm obviously high – and they were chatting and laughing in a low tone about something.

Qin Lie looked towards Ling Chengye, then towards the carriage before frowning slightly.

"You're finally back." From the town entrance Ling Chengye finally saw his figure, and with a sudden surge of spirit walked quickly towards him.

Far away, those gorgeous female martial practitioners at Du Jiaolan's courtyard noticed Ling Chengye's actions and smiled. They seemed to find this amusing, and interacted with each other with covered mouths and light laughters.

On occasion they would take a glance towards Qin Lie, but although they were smiling, their gazes were all filled with a kind of natural arrogance...

—It was the attitude of a high ranking martial practitioner looking down at their inferior counterpart.

“Uncle Ling.” Qin Lie walked forwards and let out a small sigh, “You purposely waited for me here, but what exactly do you want me to do?”

Ling Chengye suddenly looked embarrassed, and for an awkward moment, he couldn’t find the right words to speak. He looked back towards the carriage and thought of tomorrow’s deadline, and finally he forced himself to say, “Uncle Ling has done you a disservice...”

Qin Lie kept quiet.

“But this is a once in a lifetime chance for Little Shi and Xuanxuan, and the entire Ling Family. It is an opportunity that I didn’t even dare to dream of!” Ling Chengye sucked in a deep breath and sighed, “Ling Family is just a very, very small force, and we have no choice but to attach ourselves to Nebula Pavilion to barely survive. Ten years ago, my wife and many of my childhood friends were lost exactly because of Ling Family’s weakness.”

“Because the Ling Family is weak, my second brother had died in shame, and all I could do was to endure. Even though I knew very well who did the deed, I could only feign ignorance and suffer that

wench, Du Jiaolan's cold glances and words..."

He stared deeply at Qin Lie and with a look of pain said sincerely, "Uncle Ling has done you a disservice. No matter how much you despise me, I am willing to accept all of it and will never rebuke a single word. But, but Uncle Ling hopes, hopes that you can persuade Little Shi to see reason, because not only is this opportunity tied to Ling Family's fate, it is also tied to Little Shi's lifetime growth. If she misses this opportunity, then she will regret it for a lifetime, and so will Ling Family..."

"Qin Lie, we also ask of you to persuade Little Shi." After they heard that Qin Lie had returned, both Ling Chengzhi and Ling Kangan also hurried over to plead for his help.

Seeing the trio's anxious looks and hearing their desperate pleas, the corner of Qin Lie's mouth was curled in bitterness and after a long moment of silence he finally spoke, "Why do you think I can persuade her? You are her father, her uncle, her granduncle; if you have failed, then how can I possibly succeed?"

"Because Big Sister loves you." Ling Xuanxuan voice came silently from the trio's back. Her eyes were flickering, her lips were pursed. She said, "Because she didn't want to break the engagement. Because she didn't want to see you hurt. Because she is afraid that once she leaves Ling Town, she will lose you forever..."

Thunder struck Qin Lie's mind.

“Qin Lie, do not listen to them. If Big Sister is gone, then it is unlikely that she will ever return to Ling Town. Unless, unless you can become strong enough to enter forces at the level of Dark Asura Hall or Seven Fiends Valley, all hope may be lost between you and Big Sister.”

Ling Xuanxuan ignored Ling Chengye and the others’ scoldings and continued stubbornly, “In the past I have held a misunderstanding towards you, but I did not forget that you have saved Ling Family many times, both in the open and from the shadows. I do not understand what it is to look out for the family’s greater good, but I just feel that Ling Family should at least know gratitude; know to keep their promise with grandfather Qin Shan. That’s it. That’s all I want to say…”

Finished, without caring for the scoldings of Ling Chengye, Ling Chengzhi and Ling Kangan, she turned her head and walked away.

Qin Lie was stunned because of her words for a very long time.

“Unless you can become strong enough to enter forces at the level of Dark Asura Hall or Seven Fiend Valley, all hope may be lost between you and Big Sister…”

“If I do not work hard, I will fall further and further behind. I just want… want to keep up with your footsteps; I don’t want to become your burden…”

Ling Xuanxuan and Ling Yushi’s words resounded again and again inside his head, sending him into a long trance.

“Where is she?” After a long while, Qin Lie asked suddenly.

Ling Chengye frowned deeply while feeling deep anxiousness inside his heart. Pointing towards Qin Lie’s stone house, he said, “For the past three days, she has locked herself in your house…”

Qin Lie’s heart suddenly tightened, and without waiting for Ling Chengye and the others to speak he swiftly walked towards his own house.

“How do you think the brat will choose?”

“Who knows? He should know very well that once she leaves, she will rise to the skies like a meteor. If he lets go, then he may very well lose her forever.”

“What if he doesn’t? If the girl changes her mind later, won’t she be complaining about it everyday?”

“I’m very curious about his decision.”

Beside the extravagant carriage, a few beautiful women stared at Qin Lie’s back from afar. They conversed softly, and their eyes overflowed with great curiosity.

Among them was a girl who looked to be only in her early twenties. She wore a dark blue gauze dress and her figure leaning

against the carriage of white jade was incredibly tall and slim. Her skin was like snow, and her beautiful face shone with jade-like luster...

She seemed to be uninterested in the group's conversation and had not uttered a word since the beginning. Her head was bowed as though she was cultivating in silence.

However, those beautiful women in their thirties seemed to care deeply about her opinion, and one of them couldn't help but ask, "Lu Li, what do you think about this matter? If that brat is willing to let go then you will have two new juniors. What do you think of that?"

These women were just the martial practitioners of Dark Fiend Valley, and not Jiu Liuyu's direct disciples, so their status were far more insignificant compared to Lu Li.

"I don't feel like wasting energy making blind guesses. The only thing I'm interested in is the final result."

The rest of the women laughed awkwardly at the reply; seeing that she had said her part, they all stopped discussing.

On the other side.

"Knock knock knock." Qin Lie knocked the door gently.

"I said that I don't want to see anyone!" Ling Yushi yelled in a

low tone from inside the house.

“It’s me.” Qin Lie said with a grave voice.

There was no voice coming from the house. Instead, there was only the rustling of clothes being tidied…

After a while, the door was opened from the inside, and a downcast Ling Yushi moved aside and stared silently towards him. After he came in, she then turned around and shut the door tightly, so that Ling Chengye and the others who were rushing over would not be able to see anything.

Inside the house, the duo stared at each other in silence. They both felt like they had a million things to say, and yet not know how they should start.

“I…” Qin Lie started.

“If you’re here to persuade me, then you can stop. I won’t hear it.” Ling Yushi interrupted suddenly.

Qin Lie sighed softly and stayed quiet for a while. Suddenly he said, “I did not come here because of the Ling Family or your father, uncle and granduncle’s persuasion. I did not come here because of your sister either. I had come, for you and me…”

Ling Yushi’s eyes flickered as she waited for him to continue, a spark of curiosity bloomed inside her heart.

“You said that you hoped to be of help to me in the future. You said you didn’t want to become my burden, hoped to keep up with my footsteps…” Qin Lie looked at her and for the first time grabbed her hands on his own. While Ling Yushi’s eyes fell into a mess, he softly continued, “I can tell you right now that if you continue to stay in Ling Town, you will never keep up with my footsteps. Only by leaving, only by going to Seven Fiends Valley can you catch up to me…”

“No, it shouldn’t be like this, I don’t want to hear it.” Ling Yushi was close to tears as she shook her head repeatedly.

“Go. Leave Ling Town, join Seven Fiends Valley and work hard for the future when you and I can be together once more.” As Qin Lie said with a heavy voice, he took out the first spirit tablet that he had spent more than half a year to successfully create and pushed it into Ling Yushi’s soft palm, saying, “This is the one and only spirit tablet that I have successfully made. It is my first step on the path of Artifact Forging. To make it happen, I have spent countless sweat and hard work, and today… I gift it to you.”

Ling Yushi’s hand shivered, she bit her lips tightly, and tears flowed from her eyes.

“If you want us to have a future, then you must leave Ling Town. Only Seven Fiends Valley can truly bring out all your talent!” Qin Lie roared.

Ling Yushi’s body shuddered intensely.

“So go. Go out and tell your father, tell that Jiu Liuyu or whatever that you’ve figured it out and that you want to go to Seven Fiends Valley.” With a heavy expression, still holding her hands, he forcefully pulled her out of the stone house before immediately shutting himself inside the house. He growled through the door, “Put on your best and wait for me at Seven Fiend Valley; wait for me to come for you in the future. I, Qin Lie, swear this now! I will come for you!”

Ling Yushi stood at the doorway, listening to Qin Lie’s croaked growls; the tears would not stop.

After an unknown amount of time, under her father’s hopeful eyes, she finally stood up with dead eyes and walked towards the direction of the rich carriage.

Inside the house, Qin Lie was curled into a ball behind the door, his eyes crimson, and his teeth gritted to keep himself from screaming.

On the other side, surprise flowed out of Lu Li’s stern eyes when she saw Ling Yushi coming over. She stood up and walked over to a window that was once of Du Jiaolan’s room and spoke through it, “Master, she has come to a conclusion.”

“Very good. Find that kid and give him a Natal Ordering Pill. Tell him to forget about Ling Yushi forever.” from inside the room, a cold, crony voice resounded.

“Understood.”

Lu Li answered once before she walked in the direction of Qin Lie’s stone house. When she and Ling Yushi crossed paths, her body shivered slightly, and it wasn’t until after she turned back to look at an indifferent-looking Ling Yushi before she finally resumed her steps.

Not long later, she arrived in front of the door of Qin Lie’s stone house and slipped a delicate little medicine bottle from the gap beneath the stone door. She said coldly, “If you can break through to the Natal Opening Realm, the Natal Ordering Pill will greatly increase your chances of success and reduce the risk of your body exploding and killing you when you ascend from the early stage to the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm.”

She paused for a second before continuing, “Your decision surprised me a little, but I still need to tell you this. From today onwards she is my junior, and no longer a simple girl in Ling Town. She has stepped into a completely new world of cultivation, and in the future, she will have broader landscapes to see. She will no longer be in the same world as you are… I hope that this Natal Ordering Pill will make you forget about her, to forget your desires for her. It will be better for the both of you.”

Once she finished, not bothering to even listen to Qin Lie’s reply, she stood up and prepared herself to leave.

“Wait right there!” Qin Lie suddenly opened the stone door and flung the Natal Ordering Pill right into her palm. His handsome face was as cold as ice as he said impulsively towards Lu Li, “You

and your master do not deserve to decide anything between her and me! You do not have the rights! Seven Fiends Valley, is it? One day I will come looking for her, and you will bear witness!”

“What an interesting fellow. Sure, I’ll wait.” Lu Li curled her lips. She smiled arrogantly and indifferently before withdrawing the Natal Ordering Pill. She even whispered, “How ungrateful...” before she finally walked away.

Chapter 55: Icestone City

At night, the lightless stone house was shrouded in darkness. Qin Lie curled up into a ball and held his knees at a corner, staring blankly towards the front.

The tables and chairs were wiped clean with not a speck of dust on them. It was as if he could hear mumblings coming from the washroom; see a lively and beautiful shadow bustling about in the room...

Those days where they spent their time together replayed again and again in his head, becoming clearer with each repetition.

And yet, she had to go...

Qin Lie clutched his chest. He felt that there were so many things he did not say in time, and didn't even know where to start. His heart ached.

"Bang!"

Abruptly the door slammed open, and one figure after another charged inside his house. Everyone of them was holding a jug of liquor in their hands.

—It was Ling Feng, Ling Xing, Ling Xiao and Ling Ying.

“Let’s drink, Qin Lie!” Ling Xing threw down the two liquor jugs, tore open their sealing oilcloths, poured an entire bowl of liquor and passed it over to Qin Lie, yelling, “Come on, drink!”

“Cheers!” Ling Feng and Ling Xiao shouted together.

Even Ling Ying had joined into the fray and urged Qin Lie to drink. Everyone of them had heavy expressions, but they did not say a word of consolation. Instead, they expressed themselves through their own actions.

Qin Lie felt his heart warm a little, and accepted the bowl, cocked his head and glugged it all down.

The fiery liquor entered his stomach, and he felt as if his chest had burned up in flames. The pain in his heart actually seemed to subside quite a bit, and he immediately forgot himself and snatched the bowls from Ling Feng, Ling Xiao and Ling Ying. Ignoring their amazement, he began pouring alcohol down his throat as if he would drown himself with it.

Ling Feng and the others felt their eyes redden. They did not say anything and simply served him even more wine.

“Let’s drink. You guys should drink as well. Let’s get drunk together!” Qin Lie growled.

“Alright! Let’s drink everyone, and don’t stop until you’re all completely drunk!” Ling Xing roared.

Hence the group threw themselves into a drinking frenzy while screaming inside the stone house, making tons of racket.

It was already midnight, and yet every Ling clansmen could still hear screams and cries coming from the house, but they all understood. They simply shook their heads after they heard the roars and thought to themselves: Let's leave them be.

It was a drunken night.

The next day, when Qin Lie opened his eyes once more, he found the sun high up in the sky. It was already noon.

Inside the stone house, Ling Feng, Ling Xing and the others were all lying upside down and scattered on top of the table, below the table, under the bed, or at a corner of a wall. Even Ling Ying was disheveled and lying soundly on top of his stone bed with saliva at the corners of her mouth, soundly asleep.

These were the friends that he had gone through fire and water together back at Celestial Wolf Mountain, and when he was at the lowest point of his life, they had joined him on a sleepless, wild night in hopes that it would reduce the pain in his heart.

Qin Lie felt grateful on the inside. He did not wake them, and instead took out the remaining spirit pills on his body and carefully slipped them into Ling Feng, Ling Xing, and Ling Xiao's clothes.

Back when he had entered the Arctic Mountain Range for the first time with Tu Ze and his group, he received those pills after looting them from the dead bodies of Shattered Ice Manor's practitioners. He had gifted part of it to Ling Yushi as her betrothal gift, and now gave the rest out...

Qin Lie stared at them deeply, silently said "take care" in his heart, and walked out of the stone house and into the town.

Soon, he heard from a Ling Family clansman that Ling Chengye had already announced the dissolution of his engagement to Ling Yushi last night, and that before the sun had even risen Ling Yushi and Ling Xuanxuan had left Ling Town together with the carriage from Seven Fiends Valley.

"Seven Fiends Valley... I will be there one day."

Qin Lie whispered once, and went straight towards Herb Mountain beneath the scorching sun.

Inside Herb Mountain's cavern.

He tidied up the loosely scattered items; putting the wooden sculpture, Nebula Token, fire crystals and other scattered materials carefully into his cloth bag.

Holding the bag, he gave a complicated look at that one jutted rock behind the stone pillar, and after a while he finally said, "It's

about time to leave…”

He then pressed the jutted rock down and left the cavern without looking back. Shortly after, he arrived at the foot of Herb Mountain.

A long time ago, his grandfather said that the jutted rock was the central button of the strange formations inside Herb Mountain. It could wipe out every trace on the inside and destroy everything.

The foundation of his Heavenly Thunder Eradication had been solidified a long time ago, so even without borrowing its interior environment he would be able to continue cultivating from here on.

In truth he could have left Herb Mountain and cultivated at Nebula Pavilion half a year ago. But he had chosen to stay at Herb Mountain, to stay in Ling Town.

Now, the one person who kept him here had left first, so he no longer had a reason to stay here.

“Boom boom boom!”

Suddenly, a shocking explosive sound came from inside Herb Mountain, and it was as if the entire mountain itself was shaking violently.

For a moment Qin Lie quietly watched from the foot of the

mountain and listened to the explosions, and after one final look towards Ling Town, he strode towards Icestone City.

An hour later.

The Ling brothers, Elder Ling Kangan and the rest made their way frantically to the foot of the mountain. A few people tried entering the cave from different directions, but they found that every cave or path had been completely blocked by rubble.

Even Herb Mountain itself seemed to have dwarfed a whole level, as if it had sunk deeply inside.

“Until this day I still do not know what is hidden inside Herb Mountain, and it looks like we’ll never find out in the future.” Ling Chengye sighed softly.

“He should be on his way to Nebula Pavilion.” Ling Chengzhi said.

Ling Chengye’s brows were locked together, “We are the ones who have let Qin Lie down, and I am the one who did not keep my promise and broke their engagement a year ahead. Sigh, I wonder why I keep feeling that I’ve made a mistake…”

Elder Ling Kangan looked towards the distance and said, “Chengye, you have done nothing wrong, do not blame yourself too much. As long as Xuanxuan and Yushi stays at Seven Fiends Valley, then the Ling Family will surely become powerful one day!

Moreover, they are Granny Jiu's direct disciple, and in the future they will be in a wider, better world. Yushi... will surely find a better man for herself too. We should be happy for them."

"I hope so." Ling Chengye sighed.

In the evening.

Just as Ling Feng, Ling Xing, Ling Xiao and Ling Ying slowly woke up from their sleep, they then received news that Herb Mountain's caverns had been completely destroyed and covered in rubble, and Qin Lie himself had disappeared without a trace.

The second they moved, they discovered the spirit pills inside their clothes and became conflicted.

Naturally they understood that Qin Lie was gone, and that he had left Ling Town and went to Icestone City.

"First Miss and Second Miss are gone, and even Qin Lie has left. We are the only ones who are left in Ling Town." Ling Xiao's expression was dejected as he looked towards the night sky, "Sigh, everything is moving too quickly. Two days ago everything was still fine, and just because Seven Fiends Valley showed up, our lives had turned around completely."

"Water will flow downwards, and man will walk towards higher grounds. This has never changed. If we want to catch up to them, then we must work harder and cultivate harder, or we will only be

left further and further behind!” Ling Feng exclaimed heavily.

“Mn!” Everyone’s expression was firm as they answered together.

……

Six days later, a thin figure stood at the entrance of Icestone City.

With a cloth bag in his hand and a face of dust, he looked up to the tall and wide stone ramparts and then at the guards on each side of the gates. He whispered, “Icestone City. I am finally at Icestone City.”

Icestone City was divided into North and South City. Shattered Ice Manor could be found in North City, and everything in it fell under Shattered Ice Manor’s jurisdiction. Most of the people entering and living inside the city were people who belonged to Shattered Ice Manor.

Likewise, South City was where Nebula Pavilion’s headquarters was situated, and they were responsible for everything inside the city.

Most of the people who lived in South City were the families of Nebula Pavilion’s martial practitioners. There were also normal people who were inclined towards Nebula Pavilion.

The two forces might live in the same city, but they were

absolutely antagonistic towards each other. They had fought each other both in the open and the shadows for many years without an outcome, and hence the grudge between the two forces had only deepened with each passing day.

Outside South City, towards the southern area would be the direction to the Arctic Mountain Range. Its perimeter were scattered with many small forces like the Ling Family, Gao Family, Du Family and so on. They all belonged under Nebula Pavilion's domain.

The northern area above North City would be Shattered Ice Manor's domain, and there were also many small forces scattered in the area.

After the Feng Family had betrayed Nebula Pavilion, the area they had moved their whole clan into was exactly that northern side of North City.

And Icestone City was situated right at the center of Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion's vassal forces.

Regardless of their respective powers, both Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion's martial practitioners had their own families and relatives; their wives, children, parents and so on. These people were either normal people or martial practitioners with low realms, and thus did not qualify to enter either Shattered Ice Manor or Nebula Pavilion to cultivate.

Such people lived in either Icestone City's North City or South

City. Whenever the two powers' martial practitioners were free of duties and were not cultivating, they would go out of Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion and spend time with their relatives and children, and live with their family at North and South City.

Between North City and South City was a Commerce Street, and again this Commerce Street was like a watershed that split up the two cities.

Because Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion were enemies, there were often huge fights erupting between them. Therefore, normally speaking, neither the normal people nor the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor would enter South City easily, and vice versa.

On the other hand, this Commerce Street between the two cities was unusually crowded. Both Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners would often appear in Commerce Street.

There were countless spirit materials, spirit herbs, spirit plants, spirit artifacts and other shops on that street, and some of these shops had incredible backgrounds and were branches that belonged to incredible forces. Not even Shattered Ice Manor or Nebula Pavilion dared to disturb them.

Although the two sides fought consistently, they had a tacit agreement to not fight in that street.

Qin Lie entered the South City through the southern gate. He did

not use the Nebula Token in his hands to enter Nebula Pavilion's headquarters immediately, but instead walked in the direction of Commerce Street.

Once he entered Nebula Pavilion he would become a core member. He could borrow their resources to cultivate, could use contribution points to enter special cultivation rooms and improve his cultivation or study martial books. He could even listen to martial practitioners' lecture on their understanding of the realms...

This was what Ling Feng and the others dreamed of, the reason he had come to Nebula Pavilion, and something he really looked forward to in his heart.

However, if he entered Nebula Pavilion and became a core member, then it was very possible that he might be sent to perform duties and thus lose his freedom.

At the moment, he hadn't recovered from Ling Yushi's departure, and his heart... was still in turmoil.

Besides, he still wanted to spend more time to familiarize himself with inscribing Spirit Gathering spirit diagrams, and thus would not be able to utilize Nebula Pavilion's cultivation resources for a short while anyway.

Therefore, he decided to slow down a little, and would enter Nebula Pavilion after he had finally calmed down and truly mastered the few spirit diagrams inside his head.

And so he arrived at a tavern very close to Commerce Street at the south and stayed inside. He locked himself in his room and continued to practice inscribing Spirit Gathering spirit diagrams.

There were twenty four spirit tablets remaining, and after his first successful experience, he was gradually gaining confidence.

He took out a tablet, calmed himself and focused his mind and consciousness on the tablet in his palm; he began to practice inscribing.

He quickly realized that, by inscribing spirit diagrams, he was able to separate himself from the pain of Ling Yushi's departure. The incredible focus needed could help him ignore everything, if only for a moment.

Therefore he threw himself entirely into the work.

He began to enjoy this dry, boring, and incredibly harsh training.

Chapter 56: Armament Pavilion

Time flowed, and another two months passed.

During these two months, Qin Lie had stayed inside the tavern and focused all of his energy towards inscribing Spirit Gathering diagrams, losing track of time.

Following his two months of practice, of the twenty four spirit tablets, fifteen of them had turned into scrap, and only nine of them had successfully been engraved with Spirit Gathering diagrams.

“I wasted fifteen spirit tablets. It seems that I am still quite far away from being able to truly master it.” Within the room, Qin Lie furrowed his brows as he opened the windows, silently musing to himself, “I don’t have any more usable spirit tablets. If I want to continue practicing, I must buy more spirit tablets. Only, once I enter Nebula Pavilion, I might not be able to be so laid back…”

Outside the window, cultivators of varying levels were passing by. They were all headed towards the Commerce Street located between North and South City.

From the room that he lived in, he could see the many shops on Commerce Street on the other side of the river, as well as the Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners who were moving along Commerce Street.

Looking carefully, he could even secretly watch the martial

practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion oppose each other as verbal conflicts arose and proceeded to glare at each other.

However, they all abided by the rules as they only shouted mutual provocations and nothing more, not daring to truly fight on Commerce Street.

Qin Lie observed out the window for a while as he rubbed his chin in deep thought, trying to determine how he was going to get more spirit tablets in order to continue practicing spirit diagram inscription.

Before he had left Ling Town, he had left all of his spirit pills and stones to Ling Feng and the rest. All he had on him were things like the wooden sculpture, some fire crystals, and the Nebula Token. Amongst these items, only the wooden sculpture and Nebula Token were extremely valuable. Meanwhile, the fire crystals were just ordinary materials and weren't valuable. Furthermore, in the future he would need them as a fire source for smelting artifacts, and thus, they couldn't be traded for spirit tablets either.

His fingers tapped on the wooden table as he looked at the nine spirit tablets which had been engraved with Spirit Gathering diagrams. After thinking awhile, he suddenly got an idea: Could spirit tablets engraved with Spirit Gathering diagrams be sold in order to buy more blank ones?

This thought caused his expression to visibly change. He might as well try his luck and see if there were any shops on Commerce Street which would be willing to buy them.

He walked down the stairs. After walking across a stone bridge atop the river, he arrived at Commerce Street which was located in between the two cities. He looked the bustling figures atop the street, many of which were either wearing the special uniforms of Shattered Ice Manor or Nebula Pavilion. There were also a few unaligned martial practitioners who wore casual clothes like him mixed in.

The two sides of Commerce Street had all kinds of various shops. There were shops selling many different things, including spirit pills, spirit herbs, spirit grass, and even various levels of cultivation art formulas.

In the center of Commerce Street was a magnificent, grand wooden five story building. At its doors, an endless stream of people flowed in and out.

Most of the slightly higher level martial practitioners would all go straight to this shop. It was as if their true purpose of coming to Commerce Street was this largest shop.

“Armament Pavilion...”

Even from extremely far away, Qin Lie could see the light reflecting off the store’s dazzling sign, without any idea how the sign had been propped up. Under the sun’s rays, the two characters “Armament Pavilion” were illuminated, attracting the attention of many.

In front of him, the martial practitioners of Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor, as well as a fair amount of regular pedestrians, moved towards Armament Pavilion. Thus, Qin Lie also subconsciously went over.

Arriving at the store's main entrance, he raised his head and once again looked at the store's sign. He was surprised to find out that, upon looking at it from so close, the two characters "Armament Pavilion" weren't overly glaring.

Instead, it seemed as if the flashing light was just used for attracting people. Once the people had been led over, they would no longer be uncomfortably bright.

From just this one small detail, it was clear that Armament Pavilion was not simple. Qin Lie inwardly nodded as he went in along with the crowd.

The first floor of the pavilion was extremely spacious. Alongside all of the walls on this floor were extremely exquisite glass cases. Within these glass cases were various delicate and beautiful spirit artifacts. There were all sorts of dazzling swords, golden spears, rings of varying colors, and hammers which flickered with light... there were at least more than ten spirit artifacts.

Many of the martial practitioners who came to Armament Pavilion were gathered in front of those glass cases displaying spirit artifacts, asking the shop's attendants for descriptions as they tried to discern the artifacts' functions, prices, and grades.

“...Common Grade Three, Common Grade Four, most of them seem to be of this grade. However, it’s no wonder that everyone comes here as, unlike all of the other stores which only sell spirit pills and spirit materials, Armament Pavilion sells spirit artifacts on the first floor. Here, they can even purchase a finished product.”

Qin Lie quietly observed for a while, paying attention to the various ongoing conversations. In no time, he understood how this place operated.

Armament Pavilion’s first floor only sold Common Grade Four and lower spirit artifacts. The second floor sold Common Grade Five spirit artifacts, the third sold Common Grade Six ones, and the fourth floor sold Common Grade Seven ones. On the fifth floor... even Profound Grade spirit artifacts could be bought!

However, starting from the second floor, there were restrictions required to ascend — one either needed to have reached the Natal Opening Realm or pay some spirit stones to prove to Armament Pavilion that they were wealthy enough to afford artifacts of that quality. This way, it would ensure that they wouldn’t waste Armament Pavilion’s time.

Carefully looking around, he discovered that the majority of people who came just stayed on the first floor, wandering between the Common Grade Three and Four spirit artifacts as they asked the shop’s attendants about prices.

Only a select few people didn’t bother staying around on the first floor and instead headed straight for the stairs to the upper floors.

In front of the stairs to the upper floors were two of Armament Pavilion's guards. They would quickly inspect anyone who attempted to proceed upward, identifying them either as a practitioner of the Natal Opening Realm or someone who had sufficient spirit stones before standing aside to allow them passage.

Everyone who went upstairs had a proud expression on their face and didn't bother to take a glance at those who remained on the first level. It was as if they had been born with superior status.

As for the people on the first floor, when they looked at those going upstairs, their expressions would be colored with envy and awe. Some would even make a slight bow and smile to express their humbleness.

"The person who just went up is Hall Master Pei An of Nebula Pavilion. He is a subordinate of Elder Wei Xing and his cultivation is of the early stage Natal Opening Realm."

"The one who is going up now is called Ji Feiwen. He's the patriarch of the Ji Family which is under the control of Shattered Ice Manor. It's rumored that he is extremely powerful and has reached the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm."

"Eh, that is?"

The martial practitioners on the first floor were constantly whispering to each other, clarifying the identities of each practitioner who went upstairs. Suddenly, at this time, their eyes

all showed astonishment towards a young martial practitioner.

This youth seemed around twenty years old and wore the practitioner clothes of Shattered Ice Manor. He looked very handsome and, with an indifferent expression, bore a surprising resemblance to Feng Yi.

He directly went up the stairs.

“Feng Kai! He’s Feng Kai! Over half a year ago he was still cultivating within Nebula Pavilion. I wonder why he suddenly defected and entered Shattered Ice Manor,” someone shockingly shouted.

From amongst the crowd, Qin Lie secretly sized up Feng Kai, his pupils shrinking.

“So this is Feng Yi’s brother, the one who clearly stated he would kill me. Unfortunately… he doesn’t seem to recognize me.”

“Feng Kai! You traitor! You, along with the Feng Family, will definitely be ruthlessly executed by Nebula Pavilion!” At this time, the Nebula Pavilion martial practitioner, Pei An, who had gone upstairs earlier could be heard on the second floor, verbally threatening Feng Kai.

“Hmph, you can try. Let’s see just who will kill who!” exclaimed Feng Kai on the second floor, not showing any weakness.

As for Qin Lie and those who remained on the first floor, they could only hear the sounds of arguing coming from above and were unable to see what was happening.

"Be quiet." An irritated sound emanated down from above. Snorting, a deep and powerful voice said, "If you don't abide by my rules, then scat!"

As soon as this remark was made, the sounds of Feng Kai and Pei An's argument immediately ceased. Their two mouths moved as they simultaneously apologized, "Elder Pan, we apologize."

"Elder Pan? Who is he?" quietly asked some newcomers who had just entered.

"Elder Pan refers to Pan Jueming, the person who was put in charge of this Armament Pavilion by Icestone City. Even Shattered Ice Manor's Lord, Yan Wenyan, and Nebula Pavilion's Master, Tu Mo, have to give him some face, so what do you think about Feng Kai and Pei An?" quietly explained a knowledgeable practitioner.

As Qin Lie listened from within the group of people, he quietly looked towards the start of the stairs, bitterly smiling inwardly.

His cultivation wasn't high enough nor was his net worth. Clearly, he wasn't qualified to shop upstairs. After thinking for a moment, he decided to take advantage of the fact that everyone else's attention was still fixated on what had just happened. Finding a female shop attendant, he took out one of the Spirit Gathering inscribed spirit tablets and asked, "Does Armament

Pavilion buy spirit materials?”

“Of course. However, it depends on the grade. We won’t buy ones which are too low,” replied the female attendant. She was in her twenties, and her looks were rather ordinary. There was also some acne on her face. She glanced at Qin Lie from head to toe and then indifferently continued, “For spirit materials, which are below Common Grade Five, I suggest you go sell them at another shop. Even for Common Grade Five spirit materials, it would be best for you to sell in bulk. The pavilion isn’t very interested in a few of them.”

Qin Lie was slightly stunned as he quietly sucked on his tongue. He hadn’t expected that even one of Armament Pavilion’s minor shop attendants would be so hard to get along with.

“This spirit tablet is inscribed with a Spirit Gathering diagram and can gather the world’s spirit energy, increasing the spirit energy a cultivator can gather by a fourth. I wonder if the pavilion has any interest in buying it?” Qin Lie had a premonition that he was about to fail. However, he was currently strapped for cash, and thus, he could only bite the bullet.

“Spirit tablets which are used for practicing inscribing spirit diagrams are only considered low level spirit materials. Even if there is a Spirit Gathering diagram inscribed within, it doesn’t make a difference,” said the attendant, shaking her head. With a cynical look in her eyes, she very clearly rejected him, “I’m sorry, but even those smaller shops outside might not be willing to buy them, let alone our pavilion.”

Qin Lie's expression became somewhat embarrassed. Nodding, he didn't continue speaking. He didn't even have the face to stay and could only disheartenedly exit Armament Pavilion.

"Let me go try out the smaller shops outside..." Reaching Armament Pavilion's entrance, he took a deep breath and smiled bitterly before stubbornly trying every shop.

"My spirit tablet can gather nature's spirit energy nearby and increase the amount a cultivator can gather by one fourth. I wonder if you have any interest towards it?"

"No interest, go try another shop."

"High level practitioners have spirit stones when they cultivate and have no use for such things. Increasing the spirit energy of nature by one fourth isn't considered much anyway as you can just find an area where the spirit energy is dense."

"Sorry, we don't buy them."

"My apologies, but my small shop is not interested."

"....."

Qin Lie went from shop to shop, but the results were all the same as he was politely rejected time and time again. They clearly had no interest towards his spirit tablets.

“I wasted an entire afternoon. The sky is beginning to darken. Hm, there is still one more shop left, might as well try it. If it doesn’t work, then I’ll go home.”

Just as he was about to give up, he saw one more extremely small shop tucked into a remote corner of Commerce Street.

The store was extremely remote as it was a good distance away from the bustling main road. Atop the door hung a sign on which the name “Li’s Shop” was written crookedly with peeling paint...

Within the building there was only the faint figure of a person sitting in a rocking chair. Perhaps it was because business was too slow, he seemed to have already fallen asleep.

.....

Chapter 57: Li's Shop

Qin Lie had run into walls all afternoon and didn't mind if he hit another before he returned to the tavern, so he walked towards this strange store.

"Little Friend, it is late already. I am closing, come back tomorrow." Before he stepped in, the person on the rocking chair actually called out first to signal that he did not even need to come in.

Qin Lie was shocked and raised his head to look at the sky. There was still some time until dusk, and many of the shops in the distance were still open. Armament Pavilion, which was further away, was still full of people and at its busiest.

"I'm not here to buy. I'm here to sell something and hope that you could take a look." Qin Lie entered politely.

Inside the room, a middle-aged uncle lazily reclined on a bamboo rocking chair and rocked himself. Looking at Qin Lie, he said lightly, "There are so many shops on this commerce street, and mine is the most remote, I'll be damned that you were able to find this place. What? Did you try all the shops here, and since no one was interested in your goods, you wanted to try it here for one last time before leaving?

His words instantly exposed Qin Lie's thought process.

Qin Lie was embarrassed and nodded honestly. "Yes, alright, you

probably won't be interested anyway. I was presumptuous, sorry for disturbing your rest, I'll leave now…"

"Give it here." The middle-aged person was actually quite handsome, just that his clothes were disheveled. He reached out a hand towards Qin Lie from his spot on the rocking chair, with no intentions of getting up; his interest clearly not great either. "You've already entered, so I'll take a look at it, just in order for you to entirely give up."

The store was extremely messy with spirit materials piled up everywhere and covered in dust, seemingly none were of a high grade.

The middle-aged person's rocking chair actually took up a great amount of space. On the two cabinets beside him were some stones and wooden materials covered in spots. There were also a few damaged artifacts. Nothing looked valuable in here, so it was no wonder there were no customers in the store.

Just by glancing over the state of the shop, Qin Lie was already very disappointed. He knew he had probably came to the wrong place and birthed the thought of leaving.

But the uncle's eyes narrowed, and his hand was already outstretched, so it would be rude to just turn and leave. He took out one of the Spirit Gathering inscribed spirit tablets and handed it to this lazy-looking uncle.

"…Spirit tablet, a low grade material used to practice inscribing

spirit diagrams. No wonder people ignored you." The uncle had an odd expression in his eyes. He casually took the spirit tablet, his eyes narrowing slightly as though he inspected it in secret.

Then his eyes lit up, as he looked at that the spirit tablet, and then became silent.

A long while later, just as Qin Lie was getting impatient, did he finally ask, "What is the use of this spirit tablet?"

Qin Lie explained.

"It can only increase the nature spirit energy in the surroundings by a fourth. For the martial practitioners who can cultivate with spirit stones and those large forces, this clearly does not have any great use." He furrowed his brows while he looked at Qin Lie, his two of his fingers playing with the spirit tablet as he said, "I don't know if there will be people interested and don't know if I am able to sell it, so I cannot give you an exact price..."

"Then never mind." Qin Lie already knew it would be so and sighed in disappointment. He could finally give up.

Reaching out to retrieve his spirit tablet, he gave an apology for disturbing the other man and turned to leave.

"Wait a moment," the middle-aged uncle shouted. When Qin Lie turned around, he said indifferently, "I do not know who would be interested, but you can try to see if it can be sold. Hm, the thing...

is actually not bad and has a bit of use. We just have to see if people will buy it…”

Just as Qin Lie was puzzled, he said, “You can stay in my shop and sell it yourself. Whether it can be sold or not will depend on you, how about it?”

Qin Lie scratched his head and found it strange. He examined the state of the shop again and said with a grimace, “Never mind…”

“What? You are disdainful of my little shop? Are you scorning it for being too remote and scared that no one will come?” asked the uncle as he chuckled. He then continued lazily with narrowed eyes, “Even though the location is not all that great, there will be a dozen or so greenhorns that come everyday, like you. Didn’t you come? At least, you can try. Isn’t that better than having it rot in your hands?”

“Then I will try tomorrow.” Qin Lie thought. He truly did have hope left and agreed.

“I am called Li Mu, you can call me Uncle Li. I see you have bags, so you must have come to Icestone City very recently? Where are you staying?” he asked.

“At a tavern nearby,” Qin Lie obediently answered.

“I still have an empty room here, it’s just a little dirty, so if you do not care, you can stay there.” Li Mu rocked on his chair as he

lazily continued on, “There are also some blank spirit tablets inside the room. If you want to practice inscribing spirit diagrams, you can use those spirit tablets first. Mn, after you sell your stuff, repay me with the equivalent price. If you really can’t repay me back, then help me look after the shop to pay it off.”

Qin Lie looked dazedly at him. A long while later, he said, “Are you serious?”

“Rubbish!” Li Mu barked and then pointed at the door behind him. “There is a little yard there and two or so small rooms. You can stay in the room on the east. There’s some blank spirit tablets in there that you can use first. During the day, you can sit here and try to sell your stuff. It’s up to you whether or not you can sell them, how about it?”

“Alright!” Qin Lie was overjoyed and inquired, “I have my possessions with me so I won’t return to the tavern. Can I move in now?”

“Yes,” Li Mu said unconcernedly.

Qin Lie nodded and chuckled. He passed by Li Mu and entered the yard through the little door behind him to go to the room he had pointed out.

Opening the door, the dust suddenly rushed at him and caused Qin Lie to cough loudly.

This room was filled with cobwebs. Wood pieces, stone fragments, unknown metals, and other items that did not look like high grade spirit materials were piled on the small wooden bed in the room. He had no clue how long they had been there for.

There were dozens of dust covered spirit tablets in the corner, and the dust somehow managed to seem even thicker than the spirit tablet itself.

“This small shop makes little profit and cannot hire people. You need to clean up yourself,” came Li Mu’s voice from the shop outside.

“Oh.” Qin Lie acknowledged and then started to clean.

He worked until midnight before he had cleaned up the small room, and as he put away all the low grade spirit materials, he took a blank spirit tablet, His eyes started shining the moment he started to practice inscribing spirit diagrams...

In a flash, nine days passed.

During the day, he and Li Mu stayed inside the shop together and occasionally hawked his spirit tablets to the passerby that came in. At night, he continued to practice inscribing spirit diagrams.

He quickly found that he had been fooled...

In the nine days, only ten people entered Li Mu’s store in total,

and they were all low ranking martial practitioners. They came in to look at the store's decorations and then left with strange looks.

—There wasn't anyone that was interested in the shop's merchandise.

Qin Lie didn't even have the chance to hawk. Usually, the other would have turned around by the time he opened his mouth, only leaving him behind, awkwardly smiling.

If it wasn't for the small room that had a supply of blank spirit tablets for him to practice, he probably wouldn't have been able to bear it and would have already left long ago. He knew that this shop's business would not be good, but he had not expected it to be terrible to that extent.

The little shop's business was unusually quiet, and it was not strange that Li Mu rested on the rocking chair every day as though he wasn't running a business.

Li Mu did not question or mention the fact that Qin Lie was continuously using up spirit tablets and did not calculate an account. He also did not ask anything about Qin Lie's identity or history. This caused Qin Lie's worries to ease, and he continued to stay.

"Uncle Li, I've already used twelve of your tablets. If my things still can't get sold, how can I repay you?" This day, Qin Lie couldn't resist and finally asked.

“I haven’t thought about it. Just use them, and I will tell you when I think of something.” Li Mu replied like so.

“Uncle Li, the store is too messy and it seems unclean…” Qin Lie’s tone was nuanced as he continued, “Why don’t I sweep around and clean it up? This way, business might be better, and they wouldn’t leave right after coming in. What do you say?”

“Ignorant people. Who cares if they go, there’s no need to pay attention to them,” said Li Mu as he snorted. He then continued, “Don’t bother. I like this kind of unclean and messy environment. If it is too clean, I can’t bear it. Just complete your own matters, and don’t meddle in other things.”

Qin Lie grimaced.

On the sixteenth day of his stay at Li’s Shop.

This day, Qin Lin was inside the shop as usual, also lazily sitting on a chair as his hands propped up his chin while he reviewed the details of the Amplification diagram’s spirit lines.

Recently, he had managed to successfully inscribe five Spirit Gathering diagrams in a row. The most recent inscription only took six hours.

He remembered when he had succeeded for the first time; it had taken him seven whole days.

Right now, he gradually started to master how to inscribe Spirit Gathering diagrams. Due to his familiarity, his inscribing speed had also clearly increased.

He presumed that he could be considered to have mastered inscribing this Spirit Gathering diagram, so he turned his attention to try the Amplification diagram.

“Li’s Shop? There’s actually a shop here…”

“Miss, do we really need to look at this shop? Going in is just a waste of time. With how remote and uncared for this shop is, it definitely has nothing.”

“We’ve already walked over, so let’s go to look.”

Conversation came from the outside, and moments later, a tall and beautiful female came in along with a middle-aged family servant.

The white-clothed female seemed to be in her twenties and wore a loose snowy-white martial practitioner robe. The color of her clothes complemented her snowy skin. She had bright eyes, a high nose, and looked like she possessed a strong personality. Her beautiful face held an innate indifference as though she was used to being in high regards, and when she looked at others, it seemed that she was looking down on them.

When the middle-aged servant came in, he shorted and said with

a creased brow, “An old one and a young one, both sitting in a daze, don’t you do business?”

Li Mu faintly smiled and nodded his head at Qin Lie to signal for him to deal with it. Li Mu himself still laid lazily on the chair, his eyes closed as he rested.

“Feel free to look around.” Qin Lie stood and looked with amazement at the white-clothed female. He secretly praised the female’s beauty, but felt that her expression was a bit too cold.

“Are you an employee?” The white-clothed female nodded distantly and said, “Introduce the rarest thing in your store to me. Don’t talk about anything common, I’m not interested.”

“Okay.” Qin Lie took out the spirit tablet with the Spirit Gathering diagram he had successfully inscribed and put in on the table in front of the white-clothed female. Then he said briskly, “The most interesting thing in our shop is this…”

“You scamp.” Li Mu grinned and muttered in shock as he shook his head.

……

Chapter 58: Spirit Gathering Board

“Once activated, this Spirit Gathering inscribed spirit tablet can directly gather the world’s spirit energy nearby. In addition, this spirit tablet can increase the amount of spirit energy a martial practitioner is able to gather by one fourth!”

“More importantly, this spirit tablet only requires the consumption of an extremely tiny amount of spirit energy to activate and can be used repeatedly!”

“If a martial practitioner cultivating in the wild had this spirit tablet, then the efficiency of their cultivation would increase. This spirit tablet would also increase the recovery speed of their spirit energy after a fight.”

“……”

Within Li’s Shop, Qin Lie held a spirit tablet within his hand as he eloquently spoke to the lady in white, passionately trying to sell his goods.

The expression atop the lady in white’s face was indifferent. After listening to his explanation for a while, she gradually became impatient, interjecting, “It only does that?”

“What else do you want?” asked Qin Lie, stopping.

“Does it help when attacking? Can it defend?” The eye-catching

lady in white prettily furrowed her brows. “If all it can do is simply increase the spirit energy of the world by a fourth, then there is no need for you to continue.”

She turned her head towards the middle-aged servant beside her, disappointedly saying, “It seems we have come to the wrong place.”

As she made this remark, she already no longer held the interest she had previously and turned around, preparing to leave.

“Kid, how many spirit tablets do you have in total?” suddenly asked Li Mu at this juncture as he still lazily sat in the rocking chair.

“Seventeen,” replied Qin Lie.

“Take them all out and activate all of their Spirit Gathering diagrams. Let me see if there are any overlapping effects,” lightly said Li Mu.

“Overlapping...”

As if an extremely bright light had suddenly appeared within his mind, Qin Lie’s eyes suddenly became shockingly bright. He had been reminded of a crucial point through Li Mu’s words.

The white-clothed lady and her middle aged servant also suddenly stopped. Qin Lie didn’t bother thinking any longer,

quickly taking out all of the successful spirit tablets and injected a wisp of spirit energy into each one, activating the Spirit Gathering diagram within.

One spirit tablet after another suddenly emitted a faint white glow, creating a rather strong suction force.

All of the scattered nature spirit energy around Li's Shop was sucked over, as if a whirlpool gradually converged all of the energy towards this one spot, and rushed into the center of the store.

Originally, many of the store's low grade spirit materials, spirit stones, and various metals had all been covered by a layer of dust, causing the air to feel turbid and polluted.

However, as the the world's spirit energy slowly accumulated, the few people within the shop could feel the air begin to naturally freshen up. After taking a few breaths, they all felt their spirits rise.

"Put the spirit tablets farther apart. Put one in each corner of the stop," commanded Li Mu as he rocked in his chair, narrowing his eyes.

Qin Lie's eyes lit up again as he hurriedly took the seventeen spirit tablets from on the table in front of him and placed them in each of the store's corners.

He separated the spirit tablets, leaving seven in the middle, while

evenly arranging the other ten alongside the walls and corners.

Within the dilapidated shop, the seventeen spirit tablets released a serene, misty light. All the spirit energy of the world, which was circulating in Commerce Street, slowly began to move towards and gather within the small “Li’s Shop.”

Within the store, the lady in white and middle aged servant, who had been about to leave, had long since stopped in their tracks.

Surprise shined from both of their eyes. Their expressions were frozen as they silently looked at the glowing spirit tablets scattered within the store, quietly feeling the changes in the world’s spirit energy.

Qin Lie’s eyes became increasingly bright as he felt the changes, his heart full of surprise.

Li Mu still lazily reclined on the rocking chair. Within the extremely silent shop, only the harsh creaking sounds of his rocking could be heard.

Commerce Street.

Several of the slightly higher level martial practitioners nearby became aware of the sudden and strange change in the flow of the world’s spirit energy. Becoming stunned, they subconsciously followed the direction of the spirit energy towards “Li’s Shop.”

“That’s weird, nature spirit energy is beginning to gather over there. Is there a powerful expert about to break through?”

“No, it doesn’t seem like that. The flow of this nature spirit energy isn’t that fast; it’s actually extremely mild. It doesn’t seem to be attracted by a person, but by some powerful spirit artifact instead.”

“Could it be that some extremely powerful spirit artifact has appeared?”

“I don’t know, let’s go and find out.”

“Mn, let us go have a look.”

On the street, only a very small portion of the martial practitioners who could sense the change were moving to Li’s Shop. Upon suddenly feeling the weird changes in the world’s spirit energy, they all became perplexed as they slowly made their way towards the shop.

Armament Pavilion.

Within the top floor of the five storied pavilion, a skinny old man donned in luxurious silk clothing who was approximately sixty years old was just about to sleep.

“Hm?”

The old man suddenly looked outside the window, and taking a deep breath, his expression suddenly changed faintly.

He directly went downstairs, going from the fifth floor to the first floor under the respectful gazes of the many shop attendants.

“Elder Pan, you?”

“Elder Pan, why have you come down from the fifth floor?”

“Elder Pan, it is currently noon. Don’t you usually nap at this time?”

“Haha, so Elder Pan does have times when he changes his habits. How interesting.”

Many of the martial cultivators on the first floor of Armament Pavilion had originally been gathered around the spirit artifacts, asking the shop attendants about details and prices. However, upon seeing that the elder had come down, they all became shocked, unable to resist opening their mouths and began whispering to each other.

The name of this old man was Pan Jueming. He was the true head of Armament Pavilion and had an extremely high status within Icestone City. Even Tu Mo and Yan Wenyan would respectfully call him “Elder Pan” when they saw him.

His unique habit of an afternoon nap was pretty much known to every martial practitioner who often visited Armament Pavilion. They also knew that during his afternoon nap, they must not make any loud noises within Armament Pavilion. Otherwise, they would be immediately kicked out and perhaps never to be allowed back in.

But today, at this special time, he had surprisingly come downstairs...

Everyone was completely astonished.

Even more so from what transpired afterwards.

All of the people who had previously ascended to the second and third floors followed Elder Pan downstairs. People with surprised expressions came down one after another from above. The two who had just ascended to the second floor for a little while came down, even though they probably hadn't been able to see very many spirit artifacts during that time. Like Pan Jueming, they all walked out onto the street.

"Elder Pan..."

A sturdy looking male wearing the practitioner attire of Nebula Pavilion descended from upstairs and walked to Pan Jueming's side, whispering something to him.

The name of this person was Wu Chong. He was the number one

Hall Master under Nebula Hall Pavilion Elder Chu Yan and had just broken through to the middle stage of the Natal Opening Realm. He had come to Armament Pavilion to look for a spirit artifact which was suitable for his techniques.

Pan Jueming didn't even turn around, only slightly nodding, as he lightly said, "It seems you felt it too."

"Mn." Wu Chong slightly bowed, his eyes showing deep respect, as he said, "My perception isn't as sharp as elder's. I only felt the change after following elder downstairs..."

After pausing for a moment, he then asked, "Elder Pan, from your point of view... what is happening?"

"We will know once we see it," casually answered Pan Jueming as he suddenly began to move forward. Wu Chong and the others who had descended all quickly followed.

"What happened? Why can't I understand what they are talking about?"

"I don't understand either. I have no clue what they could be talking about. However, since Elder Pan didn't take his afternoon nap, it could already be considered extremely peculiar..."

"They seem like they are going to look at something. Something that can catch their attention must definitely be ridiculously interesting!"

“……”

The people on the first floor were all low level Refinement Realm practitioners with correspondingly low perception skills. Unclear on what had happened, they began to curiously converse amongst themselves.

After a while, upon seeing Pan Jueming, Wu Chong, and the rest gradually walking further and further away, they finally reacted.

They all began to shout in surprise as they also followed, regardless of their original reason for coming to Armament Pavilion. They too wanted to find out just what exactly had happened.

If there was someone floating in the sky above Commerce Street, they would have been able to clearly see the subtle changes in the flow of spirit energy and discover how the world’s spirit energy surrounding Li’s Shop was circulating in a strange manner, as if Li’s Shop was a whirlpool. Right now, it was constantly gathering the world’s spirit energy nearby, causing the spirit energy within the shop to become very dense.

They would also be able to see the scattered people on Commerce Street gather in the exact same manner…

Within Li’s Shop.

Qin Lie, the lady in white, the middle aged servant, and the shop owner, Li Mu all seemed to not know of what was going on outside as they remained silent, quietly feeling the changes of spirit energy within the shop...

The seventeen spirit tablets that had been scattered amongst the various corners, cabinets, and table continued emitting a faint white glow as they gathered the world's spirit energy closeby, causing a faint milky mist to gradually appear within the shop — it was the clearest indicator that the density of the world's spirit energy within the shop had reached a certain extent.

"It's almost four times..."

The bewildered voice of the lady in white's middle aged servant suddenly broke the silence within the shop. His slightly dusky eyes looked from tablet to tablet as his expression gradually became serious.

Li Mu, who had been constantly rocking in his chair, suddenly stopped as he said, "If there were more Spirit Gathering Boards, the amount of the world's spirit energy which would be gathered... should be even more."

"Spirit Gathering Board?" asked a stunned Qin Lie.

Li Mu slightly smiled as he nodded towards Qin Lie. Afterwards, he looked in the direction of the door and leisurely said, "It should have a pleasant, easy to remember name."

Qin Lie followed his gaze and also looked at the door, suddenly discovering that a lot of people had all gathered outside this remote and empty shop since who knew when.

“Miss, these seventeen Spirit Gathering Boards can be used to build a cultivation room. With these seventeen Spirit Gathering Boards and our place’s denser nature spirit energy, if there aren’t any problems, the effects… will be extremely shocking!” quietly brought up the middle aged servant.

“Name your price,” said the lady in white towards Qin Lie. She added, “I want them all.”

“This old one is also interested.”

At this time, the voice of Pan Jueming emanated over. Shock appeared within the eyes of many who stood outside as the head of Armament Pavilion was the first person to stride into Li’s Shop.

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Chapter 59: First Transaction

“Compared to other places in the city, the world’s spirit energy is four times denser here. If one is able to cultivate inside this shop, then they would progress at a much faster rate.”

“Mn, the denser the spirit energy, the faster it can be refined.”

“It almost rivals the cultivation arenas of some high ranking forces, it’s really strong!”

Many of Icestone City’s most prominent people had gathered outside of Li’s little shop. There were people from Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, and even unfamiliar martial practitioners that were passing through Icestone City…

These people had come and gathered here due to the slight change in the flow of nature’s spirit energy and were loudly discussing it in front of the shop.

“So it is Mister Li’s shop.” Inside the room, Pan Jueming walked in and faintly smiled at Li Mu. He then looked at the Spirit Gathering Boards that had been scattered around and said, “This old one is also very interested in quality goods that can quadruple the world’s spirit energy. If you don’t mind, this old one also wants to join the ranks of those buying.”

Li Mu glanced at Qin Lie and then looked at the people outside that were furtively poking their heads in. He suddenly said, “This little store cannot hold too many people. Hm, those in the Natal

Opening Realm and higher can come in. Everyone else, please continue to stay outside."

When these words came out, Wu Chong and the others at the doorway smiled and naturally walked in.

When they entered, they saw the white-clothed female and instantly felt their vision brighten.

Then, their eyes gathered on the white-clothed female's body and showed clear shock as though they had been entranced by her beauty. They actually forgot why they had entered the shop in the first place.

Her skin was like snow, and her two eyes were as clear as pure crystal. Her cool presence was like a snow lotus blossom on a glacier and caused people to feel ashamed of themselves.

"Hmph!" The servant beside the white-clothed female snorted with a cold face.

"Boom!"

All those who were looking at her suddenly shook. That "hmph" was so loud it had hurt their eardrums.

Qin Lie, Pan Jueming, and Li Mu were completely unaffected. That "hmph" clearly was not directed at them...

“Sorry for the impoliteness…”

Wu Chong was woken by the shock and the expression on his face changed. He bowed with folded hands towards the middle-aged servant and the white-clothed female to show his apology.

The other people were shocked inside when they saw Wu Chong’s attitude towards them and became uncertain as well. Hurriedly, they retracted their gazes from the lady in white and carefully displayed their apologies.

“Haha, both of you are not denizens of Icestone City, where are you from?” Pan Jueming had a startled gaze as he smiled at the white-clothed female and her servant, asking politely.

The white-clothed female’s brows creased. She did not answer his question but instead looked at Qin Lie and Li Mu, saying coldly, “I will take all the Spirit Gathering Boards here, name a price.”

“Mister Li, what do you think?” Pan Jueming also stated his attitude. “Our Armament Pavilion is also interested in this Spirit Gathering Board, is it possible for you to accommodate us?”

“Qin Lie? How come you’re here?”

Suddenly, Liu Yan’s voice came from the door. He had coincidentally came today to Commerce Street and felt the changes in the flow of spirit energy.

He had arrived later and made his way through the flood of low level martial practitioners gathered at the door, looking inside, and when he saw the familiar figure inside the shop, he couldn't help but call out.

"Big Brother Liu."

Qin Lie stilled slightly and then smiled. He nodded at Liu Yan who had charged into the room.

"Elder Pan, Brother Wu, Brother Zhao..."

After Liu Yan entered, he found that the occupants inside the shop were shocking and had to greet Pan Jueming, Wu Chong, and another male attired in Nebula Pavilion's robes.

Pan Jueming and the others nodded and returned his greeting.

"Qin Lie, when did you come to Icestone City? You brat, coming to Icestone City but not going to Nebula Pavilion, what are you doing here?" Liu Yan walked with a smile next to Qin Lie and smacked him on the shoulder. He said, "You might not know this, but at that time... the two hall masters under Yan Dewu's command from Shattered Ice Manor were bitten to death by the Silver Winged Demon Wolves. Feng Yi also lost an arm, ha! It was so good!"

When he said this, the faces of the two martial practitioners

inside the room, attired with Shattered Ice Manor's clothing suddenly darkened.

"He is part of our Nebula Pavilion?" Wu Chong was shocked.

The other people also looked at Qin Lie. Because they didn't recover in time, they had no clue of what was happening.

"Of course. He is from the Ling Family, one of the families under us, and he went to Celestial Wolf Mountain with us," Liu Yan explained simply but did not elaborate any further. But even so, everyone's attention landed on Qin Lie.

Even Li Mu showed shocked astonishment. He had finally learned Qin Lie's identity and name through Liu Yan's explanation.

"Name a price, don't waste my time!" The white-clothed female's expression was impatient as she coldly interrupted everyone's conversation. She exclaimed, "Quick!"

"Mn, let's manage this first." Pan Jueming also agreed.

Li Mu glanced at Qin Lie, rubbed his chin, and said, "One Common Grade Seven spirit stone for one Spirit Gathering Board. Mn, you just have to give seventeen Common Grade Seven spirit stones."

"Mister Li," Pan Jueming opened.

Li Mu waved his hand at him and said, “She came first.”

Pan Jueming nodded and did not say anything else as though he respected Li Mu’s decision greatly.

“There’s at least some protocol.”

The white-clothed female nodded slightly and then walked outside. Wu Chong and Zhao Duo, the two Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners that were blocking the door, had shocked faces when they saw her turn around and hurried to turn their bodies to let her pass.

“Seventeen Common Grade Seven spirit stones, please check.” The middle-aged servant that remained swiped his left hand on the table before Qin Lie. When his left hand moved away, seventeen glowing jade stones were on the table, each flowing with faint luminescence. It was possible to see the quality was high with just a glance.

“Alright.” Li Mu’s gaze only briefly swept over them before nodding.

Qin Lie, on the other hand, looked at the servant next to the white-clothed female, or more accurately, he was looking at a crisp green ring on this person’s left hand...

He was the closest, so he saw it the clearest. The seventeen

glowing jade stones that suddenly appeared on the table came from that green ring. This had fascinated Qin Lie.

While he was in shock, the person moved and picked up the scattered Spirit Gathering Boards. Whenever his left hand touched the Spirit Gathering Boards, they disappeared.

“Spatial ring…”

Liu Yan’s eyes were locked onto the ring on that person’s left hand as he exclaimed lightly in a dry voice. His expression was slightly strange.

He was not the only one. Inside the shop, Wu Chong, Zhao Duo, and the people from Shattered Ice Manor also had dumbfounded expressions as they all looked at the ring on that person’s hand.

“Haha, not someone from Icestone City, as expected.” Pan Jueming smiled and then nodded slightly towards the middle-aged servant before stealing a look at the ring.

That person did not chat with anyone else and did not say another word after putting away the Spirit Gathering Boards. He did not even spare a look at anyone before walking out of Li’s Shop.

As the Spirit Gathering Boards were put away, the thick spirit energy inside Li’s Shop also gradually dissipated. In a short period of time, the level of spirit energy returned to normal once more.

Many people were clamoring over the Spirit Gathering Boards and looked around to feel the change in spirit energy. They gathered and discussed closeby.

“Big Brother Liu, a spatial ring?” Qin Lie suddenly inquired in a low voice.

“The inside of the ring forms a space that can store items. Even the lowest tier spatial rings are worth cities.” Liu Yan’s voice was moderate as he explained to Qin Lie. “In our Icestone City, only Shattered Ice Manor’s Manor Lord Yan Wenyan, our Nebula Pavilion’s Pavilion Master, and Elder Pan have the lowest grade spatial ring, just these three people.”

Qin Lie’s expression changed. He finally understood why everyone was so incredibly astounded.

“Mister Li, where did you get these Spirit Gathering Boards? My Armament Pavilion is very interested, is there any merchandise left? If there are, Armament Pavilion can purchase this according to your price of Common Grade Seven spirit stones, what do you think?” After that person left, Pan Jueming smiled slightly and looked at Li Mu again.

Li Mu’s expression was relaxed as he said coldly, “There are more, but it will take some time. When I get a new batch, I will inform you.”

“Good.” Pan Jueming nodded and then looked at Qin Lie, saying

with a slight smile, “What is the relation between this young one and you?”

“A shop apprentice,” Li Mu casually replied and then he shrank back into his rocking chair as he relaxedly said, “That’s all for today, everyone, leave.”

Li’s Shop hadn’t ever had good business, nor could it gather this many people in a hundred years. He didn’t take this opportunity to hawk more goods or gather more eyes, instead chasing them all out at once.

Either Li Mu actually had no idea how to conduct a business or did not care about Li’s Shop at all. This caused everyone to chuckle.

“Mn, see you soon.” Pan Jueming was the first to leave.

The people dressed in Shattered Ice Manor’s robes looked at Wu Chong, Liu Yan, and Zhao Duo with slightly cold expressions and also committed Qin Lie’s appearance to memory before they left.

The two hall masters of Nebula Pavilion, Wu Chong and Zhao Duo, chatted out of friendliness for a while longer after learning Qin Lie’s identity and background, in order to get him to report to Nebula Pavilion as soon as possible, before leaving as well.

The people around were shocked, but after the powerful people left one after the other, they lost interest and gradually left.

Liu Yan and Qin Lie chatted for a while longer with Liu Yun asking him why he was currently an apprentice at Li's Shop and why he did not go to Nebula Pavilion earlier to use their cultivation resources to advance himself as quickly as possible.

When Qin Lie stated how he was worried that doing missions would affect his cultivation, Liu Yan couldn't help but grin and then told him the person in charge of missions was Han Feng's father, Elder Han Qingrui. Liu Yan explained that, with the relationship between him and Han Feng, if Qin Lie did not want to do missions, Hang Qingrui would not make life difficult for him.

Also, Liu Yan stated that, unless Nebula Pavilion encountered great trouble, they would usually not force people to complete missions and that the pavilion would give the martial practitioners the freedom of choice.

Qin Lie finally understood that he had worried too much.

Liu Yan conversed with him for a little while longer before bidding farewell, reminding him once more to come to Nebula Pavilion as quickly as possible.

Li's Shop once again became quiet.

"I did not tell others that you inscribed the Spirit Gathering Boards and did not let you shine in front of others, are you disappointed?" In the suddenly quiet shop came Li Mu's voice. His eyes were squinting as he looked at Qin Lie with an amused

expression.

"No, as long as I can make money," Qin Lie said sincerely.

Li Mu nodded. After a moment, he suggested, "You can continue to inscribe Spirit Gathering diagrams on the spirit tablets. I can also help you sell the Spirit Gathering Boards. However, it would be best if you did not let others know that the Spirit Gathering diagram on there... were inscribed by you."

Qin Lie stilled. "Is there a need to intentionally conceal it?"

"Just listen to me." Li Mu's brow creased.

"Mn." Qin Lie did not understand but nodded and inquired no further.

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Chapter 60: Amplification Spirit Diagram

“Your Spirit Gathering Boards are being sold from my shop, so I will take a portion as commission. Seventeen Common Grade Seven spirit stones, hmm, I will take two as commission and the remaining fifteen are yours, how is that?”

Li Mu’s expression was faint as he lazily rocked the chair and drawled after Qin Lie closed down the shop.

“No problem.” Qin Lie took out two spirit stones from the pile on the table and handed them to Li Mu. He then asked, “So how many spirit tablets for practicing can I exchange Common Grade Seven spirit stones for?”

“One tablet for every Common Grade Five spirit stone. For Common Grade Seven spirit stones... how many do you think you can get?” Li Mu said with a smile.

When he said this, Qin Lie’s eyes suddenly showed joy. “Twenty five spirit tablets.”

Spirit stones were ranked based on the spirit energy they contained within. If the spirit energy in five Common Grade One spirit stones were added together, it would be roughly equivalent to a single Common Grade Two spirit stone. So, obviously, one Common Grade Two spirit stone was the same as five Common Grade One spirit stones. Using the same principle, one Common Grade Three spirit stone was equivalent to five Common Grade Two spirit stones...

Based on this ratio, one Common Grade Seven spirit stone was worth five Common Grade Six spirit stones or twenty five Common Grade Five spirit stones.

It was also equivalent to twenty five spirit tablets.

Other than the two stones given to Li Mu as commission, he had fifteen stones which could be exchanged for three hundred and seventy five spirit tablets, supplying his inscription practice.

He had used up two thousand Nebula Pavilion contribution points and only gotten four hundred spirit tablets. Now, through the selling of Spirit Gathering Boards, he had easily obtained so many spirit tablets. This current turn of events made him elated, and he suddenly realized the Spirit Gathering diagram that he possessed would be of great help to him in the future.

“There should be more than a hundred blank spirit tablets in that room of yours. You have already used some. Hm, I will calculate it together. Give me four more spirit stones.” Li Mu stuck his hand out at him.

“Mn, okay.” Qin Lie handed over another four spirit stones. Thinking about it, he shoved all the remaining spirit stones into Li Mu’s hands, saying, “I need more spirit tablets. Can you help me to exchange all of this?”

“No problem,” Li Mu replied with a slight bit of astonishment. He didn’t hold back at all and took all of the remaining spirit

stones. “There are shops on Commerce Street that sells spirit tablets, so I can buy them with spirit stones. However, think this through, eleven Common Grade Seven spirit stones could net you a pretty good spirit artifact in Armament Pavilion. You’re sure you want to use all of these to buy spirit tablets?”

“Yes,” Qin Lie confirmed.

Nodding, Li Mu faintly said, “Alright, I will help you turn these into spirit tablets.”

“Uncle Li, that spatial ring... what is its usual price?” Qin Lie’s mind moved and he suddenly inquired. His eyes clearly showed his desire for one.

If he could have a spatial ring that could form its own space, he could abandon his cloth bag. After Liu Yan’s explanation of spatial rings, he became deeply interested in them. He thought that if the price wasn’t too high, he could consider getting one for himself.

“That’s not something you should be thinking about currently.” Li Mu was not gentle in crushing his hopes. “Even the lowest grade spatial ring requires at least three thousand Common Grade Seven spirit stones, that stuff isn’t something anyone can have. Right now, your cultivation realm is low and you do not have many possessions, so you do not need to be so luxurious.”

“Three thousand Common Grade Seven spirit stones?” Qin Lie gaped inside.

“This is a conservative estimate. Usually, the value of a spatial ring would exceed this price.” Li Mu jerked the corners of his mouth and comforted him, saying, “In all of Icestone City, only three people possess spatial rings. Don’t think too much about it, kid. Hm, if, one day, you join a great force and you have more materials and equipment, you might be able to consider getting one.”

“I thought too much.” Qin Lie grimaced.

Currently, he needed four to six hours to inscribe a Spirit Gathering diagram and then had to rest for a while after.

At most, he could only inscribe three Spirit Gathering diagrams a day, which was three Spirit Gathering Boards. And each Spirit Gathering Board could only be sold for one Common Grade Seven spirit stone...

He calculated that if he wanted to get a spatial ring right now and inscribed spirit diagrams without rest, he would need three years. Furthermore, he had to somehow eliminate all failures in order to gather all the spirit stones needed to buy the lowest grade spatial ring.

—He decisively gave up.

“You can enter Nebula Pavilion at any time, so there is no need for you to stay here in my little shop. Uh, what are your plans for the future?” Li Mu asked.

“Your place here is pretty quiet. If Uncle Li doesn’t mind, for the time being... I still want to stay here.”

“Up to you, the little room will be empty otherwise. Mn, there is a benefit to Commerce Street, your safety is at least guaranteed here. Regardless of whether it’s Nebula Pavilion or Shattered Ice Manor, they definitely wouldn’t dare to do anything on this street.”

“Then, thank you, Uncle Li.”

Qin Lie continued to stay in Li’s Shop and focused his energy on practicing the other spirit diagrams. Uncle Li also exchanged all the spirit stones into spirit tablets for him so he could concentrate on practicing and not worry about how many tablets he had remaining.

As of this moment, he didn’t need to be in the shop during the day to sell spirit tablets, so he could use that time to practice. Additionally, he had a guaranteed supply of spirit tablets, so his progress on inscribing spirit diagrams was extremely rapid.

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North City, Shattered Ice Manor.

Inside a frigid cultivation room, Yan Ziqian, Yan Qingsong, Feng Yi, and some others were sitting on a an iceberg. Beside them were martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor that were all

concentrating on their cultivation.

The walls of this cultivation room were made from special ice jade stone, and this special stone could turn spirit energy into cold energy to nurture people who were cultivating in cold and ice arts, greatly enhancing their growth.

The martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor mostly cultivated ice and cold arts, so not long after Shattered Ice Manor was established, they spent an enormous sum to build this cultivation room for the martial practitioners of the manor to cultivate.

Inside the cultivation room, circular ice stones were scattered about like millstones.

The martial practitioners that came here to cultivate would sit on these stones meters from each other and cultivate amongst themselves.

“Qin Lie? He’s at Li’s Shop?” Feng Kai opened his eyes and looked at a martial practitioner far away. “Are you sure that person is the Qin Lie that caused my younger brother to lose an arm?”

That person was one of the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners that had appeared a few days ago in Li’s Shop. He grinned and replied, “Liu Yan yelled it himself, how can I be incorrect? Liu Yan wouldn’t recognize the wrong person, it has to be that Qin Lie. I’ve investigated recently, and he also used the pseudonym ‘Ling Lie’…”

“Qin Lie! This person left Elder Yan in a sorry state and almost caused him to be bitten to death by the Demon Wolf King!” Yan Qingsong shouted coldly.

“Qin Lie, Qin Lie...” The Young Manor Lord of Shattered Ice Manor, Yan Ziqian, murmured with a furrowed brow. His face suddenly became dark and frigid as he shouted, “It’s him! It’s definitely him! If it wasn’t for him, Tu Ze and the others wouldn’t have left the Arctic Mountain Range alive!”

“Ziqian, your prior loss at Arctic Mountain Range was due to him?” Yan Qingsong was shocked.

“Tu Ze called him Ling Lie, who would it be but him?” Yan Ziqian’s body was freezing as he continued, “He must cultivate a rare thunder art. When he attacks, lightning and thunder are released, is it like that?”

Among these people, only Yan Qingsong and Yan Dewu had gone to Celestial Wolf Mountain, so only they could recognize Qin Lie since they saw Qin Lie fight. Hearing this, he was sure. “Yes, it definitely is this person. I saw him attack with my very own eyes, he cultivates a thunder art!”

“I will go to Li’s Shop and kill him.” Feng Kai stood, coldness filling his handsome face. “If it wasn’t for him, my brother wouldn’t have lost an arm, the Feng Family would not have been exposed, and even the Fiery Solar Jade Mine would have been ours!”

“I will kill him,” Yang Ziqian exclaimed lowly.

“You can kill him, but you definitely cannot act in Commerce Street.” Yan Qingsong’s brow furrowed. “That business street forbids private fighting. The rules were set in place by Dark Asura Hall, so Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion must unconditionally abide by them. If you want to kill him, set up a more thorough plan and wait until he leaves the street.”

“Mn, take note of his habits and get people to learn them.” Yan Ziqian’s face instantly calmed down.

“Heehee, I’m the best at things like this, leave it to me,” Yan Qingsong stated.

……

Time flowed quickly.

Another three months passed.

In this period of time, Qin Lie continued to stay in Li’s Shop, working hard on inscribing the Amplification diagram.

It was probably due to his experience of success with the Spirit Gathering diagram that he didn’t make many mistakes when he practiced inscribing the Amplification diagram. This caused his

progress on the Amplification diagram to be much faster than when inscribing the Spirit Gathering diagram.

His consumption of spirit tablets was also much less than with the Spirit Gathering diagram. Up to now, he had only scrapped two hundred spirit tablets, and he predicted that the Amplification diagram… could successfully inscribed soon.

In this period of time, because Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had broken into the Natal Opening Realm and were in seclusion to stabilize their cultivation, no one came to find him.

Only little fatty Kang Ze, Zhu Peng, Han Feng, and the others came to find him a few times after learning he was at Li's Shop. They also invited him to Nebula Pavilion and wanted to take him to see the "interesting places" in Icestone City.

He was at an important stage in learning the inscribing process of the Amplification diagram, so he had refused with a smile multiple times. But he also stated that he would soon report to Nebula Pavilion to rest their hearts.

"Poof!"

—A thread of green smoke came from the spirit tablet. The complex Amplification diagram inside the spirit tablet suddenly crumbled.

Qin Lie's expression was fragile as he took his hands away with

empty eyes. He took out a new spirit tablet and prepared to start again.

"Kid, sometimes, working hard endlessly is not the correct way. If your nerves are too tense, your failure rate might increase. If you are too urgent in pursuing success, it usually has the opposite effect." Li Mu's voice suddenly came from outside the door. "May I come in?"

Qin Lie was shocked. He temporarily put down his inscribing practice and replied, "Of course you may."

Chapter 61: Strong Wine

Li Mu walked into Qin Lie's little room.

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

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

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

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

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

Shaking his head, Li Mu continued, "No, but I know an Artificer. That guy has many bad habits and seems to have an obsession with cleanliness in daily life. He needs to clean everything and bathe many times a day, yet when he starts forging, he would become

dirty to a frightening degree. He will not eat or bathe for multiple days and only return to normal once he stops."

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

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

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

"This isn't guidance, I'm just talking about a habit of my friend in hopes that you can gain a flash of inspiration." Li Mu went silent for a moment and then started once more, "My artificer friend, when he encounters a barrier while inscribing spirit diagrams and cannot break through after repeated tries, would put it down completely for a period of time."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a big tree in the middle of the yard with a stone table and some benches beneath it. There were already some side dishes

and wine on the table, giving off a fragrant and appetizing scent.

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

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

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

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

He had never drank such strong wine before!

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

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

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

“It’s like this when drinking for the first time. It will be fine when you get used to it,” Li Mu snickered. “If you can’t bear it,

hmm, you can dilute it with a bit of water. When your stomach gets used to it, you can take small slow sips."

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

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

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

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

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

"Good, good wine..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So that’s how it is.” Li Mu made a sound and then said, “You should go to Nebula Pavilion and ask to be Yao Tai’s assistant. Yao

Tai is an artificer of Neula Pavilion, his skill in spirit diagrams is... very normal, but he has some skill in combining materials and smelting them to become ‘artifacts.’ You can go and learn from him.”

Qin Lie’s expression changed slightly. He thought carefully and then asked, “Artificers only pass on their knowledge of artifact forging to their disciples and even occasionally conceals it from them. That Yao Tai... will he teach me? Will he teach me how to smelt materials into ‘artifacts’?”

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

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

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

“You will know when you try.” Li Mu smiled meaningfully.

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

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

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

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

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

Li Mu paused, looked deeply at Qin Lie, and then faintly smiled. “In Spirit Realm, there are many continents like Scarlet Tide. On

the Scarlet Tide Continent, those at the highest rank are only at the Copper rank, but on other continents, there are Silver ranked forces and even Gold ranked forces! Those continents are even vaster than Scarlet Tide, more prosperous, and even possess wonders you cannot even dream of or imagine!”

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

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

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

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Chapter 62: Nebula Pavilion

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the little courtyard, Qin Lie stood below a tree and recalled Li Mu's words from last night as his thoughts wandered. "So the level of existences such as the Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley

aren't the absolute strongest powers either. They also needed to adhere to the other two Copper Ranked powers."

He felt the his own minisculity.

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

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

Over two hours later.

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

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

Qin Lie nodded.

The gate guard hurriedly left.

Soon enough, little fatty Kang Zhi as well as Han Feng arrived together and happily laughed the moment he saw Qin Lie. "Damn

guy, you are finally willing to come report in at Nebula Pavilion! I really can't figure you out, what were you doing at Li's Shop? That's only a spirit material shop, what can it give you?"

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

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie slightly nodded while listening and inwardly exclaimed

that Nebula Pavilion was truly Nebula Pavilion; as expected, it was not something that the Ling Family could match up to.

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

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

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

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

Regarding the various realms of the martial way, as well as knowledge about artifact forging, he didn't know much about them. His familiarity with these general things weren't much at

all, which was why he was still worried about breaking through to the eighth level of the Refinement Realm even after his meridians were filled with the thunderous energy.

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

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

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

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

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

"The building across the Scripture Tower, yeah, that one on our

right, would be the Artifact Tower. There are some spirit materials and spirit herbs in there. Naturally, the most precious would be spirit artifacts. However, the rank of the spirit artifacts inside aren't especially high either and are generally below Common Grade Five. Definitely lower than Armament Pavilion's spirit artifacts, for sure. They can also be traded with contribution points..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Uncle Han,” Qin Lie spoke.

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

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

“I had already finished setting up your identity card a long time ago. Here, take this.” Han Qingrui handed over a greenish-brown iron plate. The front side of the plate had the insignia of a nebula while the back was inscribed with Qin Lie’s name. “At first, Ling Lie was inscribed on it, but then, we found that you, brat, had used an alias, even wasting an extra plate for us.”

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

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

The Nebula Token was specially made for Tu Mo and Tu Ze by

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

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

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

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

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

Han Qingrui looked at him and explained, "Us five elders are responsible for our own duties and are respectively in charge of different affairs. Of them, my affairs are relatively safe and relaxed, so normally there wouldn't be any injuries or deaths.

Naturally, gaining large amounts of contribution points will also be relatively difficult. Elder Ye Yangqiu isn't too different from me either, the casualties are relatively few. There is not usually a need for manpower to be replenished, and contribution points aren't easy to come by either."

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

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

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

——This is what a power ought to be like.

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

same camp as Uncle Han and Chu Peng's father, Uncle Chu..."

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

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

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

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

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

Kang Hui was Kang Zhi's father and was very good friends with

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

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

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

"Great Master Yao?"

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

...

Chapter 63: Great Master Yao

“What’s wrong?” Qin Lie asked.

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie silently nodded. “I understand.”

“Great Master Yao is an Artificer of the pavilion. He has already been here for over twenty years and can still only successfully forge Common Grade Four spirit artifacts. Mn, his ranking would also be at the Common Fourth Rank.” Han Qingrui pondered and said, “Advancing ranks in Artifact Forging is much more difficult

than that of a martial practitioner's realm advancement. Practicing forging would require enormous training resources as support, millions of tempering and research, astonishing comprehensive abilities, as well as... a great teacher's guidance. Without a great teacher, without anyone to teach the inscription of spirit diagrams, it is nearly impossible to become an Artificer on one's own."

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

Little fatty Kang Zhi voluntarily assumed the duty of explaining. He looked toward a building not too far away, showing Qin Lie that the place over there was precisely Great Master Yao's forging grounds, then said while bitterly smiling, "Great Master Yao was also previously a martial practitioner, though his realm wasn't too high. Uh, he seems to only be at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm even now. It is said that his luck reached as high as the heavens and he unwittingly bought a scripture at Commerce Street. He later discovered that there were a few eccentric diagrams in the last few pages of the scripture. Only after fumbling for a long time did he come to realize that those were the most basic spirit diagrams. Then, he went wild with joy and started trying to forge artifacts through trial and error...

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

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

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

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

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

“Which is to say, Great Master Yao’s achievements are merely so much, and it would be very tough to advance any further.” Han Feng interjected, “He came into the profession without much proficiency, with no one to show him the path and no guidance

from a master. Most importantly, he doesn't have any way to acquire higher ranked spirit diagrams, so he cannot inscribe higher ranked spirit artifacts either."

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

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

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

Kang Zhi illustrated Yao Tai's situation in minute details and

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

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

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

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

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

They had explained Yao Tai’s situation very clearly and

thoroughly without any covering up; but since Qin Lie still insisted, there was nothing they could do either.

"Alright, I'll arrange it for you." Han Qingrui nodded at last.

Holding a writing brush with his head lowered, he very quickly wrote a introduction letter on the paper, explaining Qin Lie's identity and status. He stamped it and then passed it to Qin Lie. "Take this letter, and just go directly report to Yao Tai over there. Mn, before that, let Han Feng take you to the warehouse, pick up your garments, and arrange your lodgings."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Usually, Han Feng, Chu Peng, and I will be in the pavilion, and we only go out at night to play around. If you need any help, you

can come and seek us out. Oh, right, let's go take a stroll tonight, we'll hold a welcoming reception for you!" Kang Zhi's eyes brightened as his chubby face revealed a hint of ambiguity. "I'll take you to a good place!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

side.

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

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

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

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

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

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

clamorously commented.

...

Chapter 64: Target Locked

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

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

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

His expression suddenly became dark and cold.

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

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

“Boom!”

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

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

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

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

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

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

“Hmph!”

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

A pure, vigorous fluctuation of spirit energy surged out from

within the glowing dark purple sphere as the glowing sphere in his hand was thrown out by the person.

"Poof poof poof!"

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

Mn?

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

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

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

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

A strong sense of crisis seemingly surged over from each corner, causing the hairs on Qin Lie's body to stand up as his heart and

expression became uneasy. He knew that his opponent's attack would be coming soon.

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

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

"....."

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

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

"Just where is he?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Found you.”

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

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

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

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

“Boom!”

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

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

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

“Bang!”

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

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

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

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

"Interesting."

"....."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Definitely Gao Yu. You don’t even have to think about it. Could

it be that you think he is stronger than Gao Yu?”

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

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

“……”

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

“Qin Lie!”

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

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie nodded.

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

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

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

power, you two are a little bit too conspicuous."

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

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

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

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

"No problem," readily agreed Qin Lie, nodding.

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

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

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

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

Chapter 65: Borrowing Books

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the subordinate forces, they needed to break through to the

Natal Opening Realm before they were twenty to enter Nebula Pavilion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That person helped him deduct it and then took out a key to open the bookcases, retrieving and passing on the books Qin Lie wanted

to him. He then said, “If the books are damaged or lost, you will need to compensate ten times the cost to borrow them. Remember this.”

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

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

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

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

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

In accordance with what he knew, the seventh level was only satisfactory when spirit energy could be channeled externally. The

eighth level was where the acupuncture points could be filled with spirit energy and where energy could be released through them.

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

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

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

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

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

He did not continue to read the two books on spirit materials and

artifacts and instead concentrated on forming the whirlpool of the ninth level. He gave in-depth thought to it and then started to put it into practice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Inscribing the spirit diagrams consumed great amounts of mind energy and spirit energy. He would only stop practicing when he used up his spirit energy and mind energy. Then, he would proceed

to use spirit pills to slowly recover. When his dantian was full again, he noticed that the spirit energy had grown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie stepped into the hall.

The hall was about ten meters tall and held up by six stone pillars. The interior of the hall was vast, and the walls were lined with large stone cabinets. The cabinets were filled with all kinds of materials, stones of different colors, unnameable wood, many beast bones, special ores, strange scales, the teeth, claws and furs of spirit beasts, and so on...

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

A middle-aged man that was slightly plump stood next to the large smelting furnace. His clothes were dirty and his hair like a bird’s nest as he looked at Qin Lie. “What benefits did they give

you? Three years, I've asked many times in the past over the last three years, but they didn't arrange a single person for me. What did they promise you?"

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

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

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

"Understand artifact forging?"

"Not really."

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

"I will listen to Great Master about everything."

"Mn, your attitude isn't bad."

……

Chapter 66: First Contact With Artifact Forging

And so, Qin Lie stayed at Nebula Pavilion.

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

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

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

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

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

For the past month, Yao Tai was just busy with his own stuff and

frowning everyday. Most of the time he would leave Qin Lie alone and focus on drawing spirit diagrams.

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

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

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

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

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

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

records of them.

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

The《Identification of Low Grade Spirit Materials》Qin Lie borrowed from Scripture Tower had only simple drawings of the spirit materials. It was just enough for people to recognize Dragon Bone Jade, Ground Crystals, Golden Rhino Horns, and other spirit materials on sight, but there were no detailed explanations or details of their purposes for an Artificer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Today, you will continue to memorize all the characteristics of every spirit material. I will be forging artifacts tomorrow, and

when that happens, you must bring over any spirit materials that I ask for at first notice. You must also make sure that the measurements are precise, and there cannot be even the slightest error!" A distinctively serious look surfaced on Yao Tai's slightly chubby face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What an annoying little girl…”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liu Ting?

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

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

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

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

That was why every time Kang Zhi mentioned Liu Ting, he would not have a single good word to offer. Words like "insolent

little brat" and "lowly little girl" would often be common utterances.

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

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

On the sidelines, Qin Lie too was frowning inwardly.

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

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

"First there was a Gao Yu, and now you. Both of you newly promoted bastards are of the same ilk with no concept of your own

status at all! And I wonder what those people inside the pavilion are thinking. The rules they make are getting more and more ridiculous. Even fellows who haven't managed to reach the Natal Opening Realm are allowed to enter Nebula Pavilion! Hmph, if my father was in that position, then don't even think that the two of you can just get in so easily!"

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

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

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

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

After that, Zhuo Qian smiled brightly towards Qin Lie and said apologetically, "This sister of yours has been busy solidifying her

realm as of late, so I had to dally until now before I could come looking for you. I really hope you don't blame me."

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

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

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

After letting go, she looked deeply at Qin Lie and said, "About that matter of yours, I've heard about it. You can say that your fiancee's luck has turned around to be able to enter Granny Jiu's sect. You have nothing to be depressed about; Seven Fiends Valley is at the same rank as Dark Asura Hall. With your talent and hard work, as long as you are alive, I am sure that one day you will be able to honorably reunite with her again and take her in your arms once more!"

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

"Hmph, the only reason you entered Nebula Pavilion was because you used your connections, and now you wish to enter Dark Asura Hall! Dream on, you fool!" Liu Ting let out a snort with a face full

of ridicule. Then, she placed the Mirror of Thousand Illusions on top of a table before rolling her eyes at Yao Tai, saying, “I’ll be coming back for this in seven days. If there are any more problems, then sooner or later, I’ll have my dad fire you!”

And with that, she walked out of the hall.

Chapter 67: Creation On The Spirit Sea

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

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

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

The day gradually turned dark.

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

Zhuo Qian didn’t mind them. She simply looked towards Qin Lie and consoled, “Granny Jiu has always been a proud person. She treats the cultivation of her apprentices with great care, so the

Ling sisters are lucky to be able to enter her tutelage. Qin Lie, you're still young, and although you may not be able to rank among forces like Seven Fiends Valley or Dark Asura Hall right now, it doesn't mean that you don't have a chance in the future."

Her beautiful face was riddled with seriousness, "To be honest, I don't know you very well, but I feel that... there's something special about you. Qin Lie, Seven Fiends Valley isn't as unattainable as it looks. If you give it your all, then one day you'll be able to enter that kind of force as well."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s been over a month. I’ve been trying to gather a whirlpool every night, and yet I could not succeed even a single time. The ascension from the eighth level of Refinement to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm is as expected... far more difficult than it was before. The main problem is that there isn’t a clue or even a ray of hope to be found. Have I made a mistake somewhere?”

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

“The ninth level of the Refinement Realm, gather a whirlpool in my dantian’s spirit sea. Whirlpool, whirlpool...”

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

“The Spirit Gathering diagram, the Amplification diagram, the Spirit Storage diagram, the Strengthening diagram...”

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

“The Spirit Gathering diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram! That’s also a whirlpool, isn’t it?!”

Suddenly, there was a flash of inspiration, and his eyes abruptly

turned bright. An uncontrollable thought began to bloom in his mind — what would happen if he tried inscribing a Spirit Gathering diagram in his dantian's spirit sea?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vaguely, a stereoscopic Spirit Gathering diagram was gradually

formed inside his dantian!

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

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

He had done it in one go!

“Boom!”

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

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

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

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

the state that was most suitable for his dantian's spirit sea!

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

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

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

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

He could finally see what had happened inside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 68: Study

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

“Qin Lie! Three Ground Crystals!”

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

“Qin Lie!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even after a year or two, they would still make mistakes when measuring materials. For example, when getting three ounces of

Quicksand Gold, they would have a tiny bit more. To them, this little bit was nothing, but little did they know that this minuscule bit would cause the smelting process to change.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie watched silently.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

……

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

……

Chapter 69: In One Go

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

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

The entire world even felt silent.

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

There was nothing else.

Now this was infatuation!

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

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

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

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

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

All in one go.

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

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

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

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

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

This was in itself a kind of ascension in realm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He put down his drawings and listened to his words.

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

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

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

looks.”

“Creeaak!”

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

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

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

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

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

“Thank you, Uncle Li!” The moment he got out, Qin Lie immediately bowed with respect towards Li Mu and sincerely thanked him. “Thanks to Uncle Li’s advice from before, I’ve gained quite a lot. Because I have listened to your words, not only I have

broken through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, I have also successfully inscribed the Amplification spirit diagram. Furthermore, I have learned from Yao Tai valuable knowledge on artifact smelting."

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

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

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

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

"I have received your guidance" Qin Lie answered in thought.

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

Qin Lie handed it over.

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

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

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

Shaking his head, Li Mu amusedly said, “I really do not know how to forge artifacts. I am not an Artificer, but the things that go through my hands are often somewhat diverse, and I have used some spirit artifacts and thus have a bit of knowledge in this area. But if you really want me to draw a spirit diagram, heheh, I won’t be able to inscribe even the simplest diagram. Every field has a master; and since I have never studied this particular field seriously, I really am not as knowledgeable as you think I am in artifact forging.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wasting energy on someone like Qin Lie.

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

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

Chapter 70: Combining Spirit Diagrams

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Boom!"

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

A perfect whole.

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

“Whoosh whoosh whoosh!”

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

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

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

Throwing the thought of business out of his mind, he

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After a pause, Li Mu then continued, “Let me put it this way. If you are able to draw your Amplification spirit diagram on a spirit artifact that’s tempered by a worldly treasure, then it is likely that the amplification effects of your Amplification spirit diagram will

probably reach up to three or even four times its potency and exceed even those spirit artifacts that I've seen!"

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

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

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

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

"Got it. Thank you Uncle Li, I'll be going in a while then."

“Mn.”

……

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yan Qingsong?" Qin Lie's expression tensed, but on the inside he wasn't too worried.

Yan Qingsong was at the ninth level of the Refinement Realm and one step away from reaching the Natal Opening Realm. But that was it; he hadn't broken through to the next Realm. Now that he had just entered the ninth level of the Refinement Realm himself, he had no fear for this person at all.

"And me too."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It all ends here." Feng Kai snorted coldly. The silver longsword

in his hands shook, and the sword gleam turned into a thin and long silver thread that fiercely lunged at Qin Lie's heart.

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

"Zzzt Zzzt Zzzt!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 71: Resonance With Thunder

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Such a beautiful girl!”

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

emerged on his face.

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

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

"Zing zing zing!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Drip! Drip!"

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

"Under my sword beam offensive from my Frost Song Sword, your body has actually not been torn to pieces. I must say I am truly surprised." As Feng Kai's figure flickered, he leisurely yet sarcastically said, "Not even your bones are broken! It seems that

the amount of toughening your muscles and flesh have gone through is even greater than I thought. However, you will still not be able to escape dying!”

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

“Boom!”

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

“Boom boom boom! Boom boom boom boom!”

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

“Boom!”

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

“Bzzt bzzt bzzt!”

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

“Bang!”

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

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

Eh?

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

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

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

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

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

“That apprentice at Li’s Shop,” said the woman in white, definitively nodding. “Before the lightning of the Ninth Heaven shot down from the void, the sound of rumbling thunder emanated out from within his body. I don’t know what strange art he has cultivated, but I can confirm… that a change within his body is what brought down the thunder and lightning from the depths of the Ninth Heaven.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The two directly went straight to Li’s Shop.

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

When he saw the woman in white and the old servant enter, Li Mu’s expression remained indifferent as he laughingly said, “This is the second time you two have come to my small shop, what

would you like to see this time?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

The woman in white and her old servant profoundly looked at Li Mu as if they had hoped to learn something through him — Qin Lie who was able to incite the thunder and lightning of the Ninth

Heaven to descend had clearly piqued their interest. They thought Li Mu might know something, so they silently observed him.

Li Mu suddenly closed his eyes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

……

Within an alley which headed towards Nebula Pavilion.

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

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

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

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

“I was truly fortuitous this time as I was actually able to accidently incite the lightning of Ninth Heaven to descend. Otherwise, I might have actually died at the hands of Feng Kai and

Yan Qingsong. Didn't I have to cultivate the Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body before being able to attract the thunder and lightning to descend from the Ninth Heaven? With my body's current state, it shouldn't have reached the stage of the Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body, yet why did it turn out like this?"

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

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

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

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Chapter 72: A Reason To Move Forward

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

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

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

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

"This..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The lightning bolt actually didn’t kill the two of you; your two lives can be considered tenacious.”

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

……

Time flew by, and half a year passed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This discovery caused him to become greatly excited!

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

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

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

This meant that his idea was feasible!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—It was obviously not worthwhile.

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

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

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

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

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

can still achieve a surprising effect.”

……

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

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

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

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

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

“There’s still no news…”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

had also rapidly increased.

Chapter 73: Accumulation

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

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh!"

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

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

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

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

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

After fighting, his complexion seemed even more pale as though

he was a seriously ill patient that left his sickbed and made people worry that he would quickly collapse and never get back up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Why say this?” Qin Lie asked.

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

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

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

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

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

ninety-three contribution points left.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She snorted and then said with a cold face, “As expected, he’s a rabid dog, biting whoever he sees. Wei Li, ignore them. Both of

them are poor and have used up all their contribution points. In a few days, we won't see them in the cultivation grounds anymore. The outside hasn't been peaceful recently, and many people will be sent out on missions. These two might go out and never come back, so why pay attention to them?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Qin Lie, come and chat with me." This day, when Qin Lie

returned to his little room, he heard Zhuo Qian shout.

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

“Coming.” Qin Lie smiled and naturally walked to Zhuo Qian’s little tower.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zhuo Qian's face was full of worry. "This is the third time. If it

fails again, I'm afraid I won't be able to bear it."

"It's failed twice?" Qin Lie was shocked.

"What did you think?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Of course. Even though the fee is slightly lower than if it

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

Chapter 74: The Risks Of Artifact Forging

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

—This was the fundamental rule of the artificer world.

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

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

“How so?”

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

“Yes.”

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

“Mn.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What happened?” he asked in puzzlement.

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

Zhuo Qian’s expression was grave. “After it left, the spirit beasts of the Arctic Mountain Range underwent a bloody conflict and the ‘Purple-eyed Flame Lion King’ has ascended to the seat of the beast king. After this violent and vicious spirit beast ascended, he directly destroyed the past agreement the ‘Icestone Snow Wolf King’ had made with the martial practitioners nearby. Large numbers of spirit beasts that live in the Arctic Mountain Range have come out of the mountains and have directed their fangs at the low ranking forces nearby.

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

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

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

Qin Lie noted it down.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If they had to go out, there was the risk of death, so all the

martial practitioners of the pavilion became especially diligent.

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm a bit afraid."

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

It was Wei Li and Liu Ting's group.

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

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

"Qin Lie, Elder Ye doesn't have enough people, so I'm preparing to leave in the next few days." In the stone woods, Gao Yu's expression was dark and cold. "The situation outside is very chaotic, but it is very profitable to earn contribution points through the hunting of spirit beasts. I don't have sufficient contribution points, and I've reached a bottleneck in my cultivation recently, so I'm preparing to go out to move a little."

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

His second sister was in the Discipline Hall and it was said that

she had a close relationship with Ye Yangqiu. Ye Yangqiu... would possibly become Gao Yu's second brother-in-law.

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

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

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

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

"Be careful," Qin Lie said.

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

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

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

……

“Qin Lie! Come over and accompany Big Brother to drink!”

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

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

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

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

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

These two weapons were extremely similar to the ones that Zhuo

Qian and Tu Ze used before, but they were clearly more exquisite and looked more beautiful. However... there was no spirit energy fluctuations, so they did not seem to be spirit artifacts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An extremely strange expression suddenly appeared on his face.

Chapter 75: Defective Product

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Spirit Gathering and Amplification diagrams were embedded within the primary diagram. The Amplification diagram had been

successfully inscribed, but the Spirit Gathering diagram… was only half complete and seemed like the person had abruptly stopped there.

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

It was only a half finished product.

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

The situation was slightly different but generally the same.

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

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

The one that had a problem was the Amplification diagram.

The Amplification diagram inside the Dragon Bone Whip was

also only half-inscribed. The artificer seemed to have discovered something and suddenly stopped.

The situation was the same as the longblade.

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

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

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

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

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

Hearing Qin Lie’s inquiry, Tu Ze managed to respond and said

with a grimace, “It seems Brother Lie‘s been with Master Yao for a while and learned something about forging. You are right, the spirit diagrams of the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip were, in the end, not inscribed.”

An inquisitive gaze appeared in Qin Lie’s eyes.

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

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

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

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

Qin Lie silently nodded.

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

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

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

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

While the compound diagrams that were specifically designed for spirit artifacts would not have problems on the spirit tablets, when they were actually used on the spirit artifact, there would be many unpredictable variables.

The material of the spirit diagram was made from many spirit materials smelted together and were more complex than spirit tablets. There were also special powers that could exist inside high level spirit materials...

With all this, the compound spirit diagram that had no problems on the spirit tablets had a high possibility of accidents on the spirit artifact.

Spirit diagrams collapsing in the process was an extremely common occurrence. There were also many artificers that were wounded in the process. Not only were conflicts between spirit diagrams and materials common situations, the incompatibility between diagrams were also common. These variations would cause the entire forging process to fail!

“Ah, I had planned to take everyone along to hunt and kill spirit beasts after these two spirit artifacts were forged and earn contribution points. Now that it has failed, my actions would be greatly discounted.” Tu Ze gulped down liquor and said with regret, “Yan Ziqian is going to overtake me.”

“Mn, I heard that Yan Ziqian has been active around Icestone City after breaking into the Natal Opening Realm. He’s already killed two Rank Two spirit beasts. It seems that someone over at Dark Asura Hall has heard his name and noted it down. Being able to be remembered by someone from Dark Asura Hall... is a great honor.”

Chu Peng furrowed his brows. “This will help him out greatly if he plans to enter Dark Asura Hall in the future. The guy really

understands when to stand out."

"Yan Ziqian's Ice Drake Sword was custom made by Great Master Lu upon request. It is perfectly compatible with the art he cultivates. Before, when he was in the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, I felt very pressed when he fought against me with it. The true power of the Ice Drake Sword could not be displayed when he was in the Refinement Realm, so now that he is in the Natal Opening Realm, it will be even more terrifying."

Tu Ze's expression was dark as he inhaled. "In the future, Yan Ziqian will be even harder to deal with. If I do not have an appropriate spirit artifact when I encounter him next time, I will be at a disadvantage... "

When the words came out, everyone's expressions became grave, their brows tightly furrowed.

Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion's relationship had always been unfriendly; Tu Ze and Yan Ziqian were arch enemies. The hate between the two flowed deep, and they would explode in a fight if they encountered each other.

In the past, Yan Ziqian's realm was slightly lower, and he could not truly display the power of the Ice Drake Sword, so Tu Ze was able to stand against him.

Now that both of them were in Natal Opening Realm, the power of the Ice Drake Sword would amplify Yan Ziqian's power many times over. Without a fitting spirit artifact, Tu Ze would be unable

to reach the limits of his art. If he met the present Yan Ziqian, the possibility of defeat was extremely high.

"The Nebula Art that I am cultivating in is the core spirit art that my father used when founding Nebula Pavilion. This art is extremely powerful. When it starts to circulate, it would form clouds of nebulas, and there are many wonders inside. However, the longblade that I use leans towards heat and fire; completely on a different path than my Nebula Art, so it cannot display my art's true power."

Tu Ze looked at the defective product and regretfully continued, "There is Stellar Iron mixed into this longblade. It is said that Stellar Iron is from the fragments of stellar explosions. This is something that can truly help me show the true power of my Nebula Art. If this blade could be forged, I would be completely confident if I had to face Yan Qiqian, but now... ah."

"Big Brother Tu, Sister Qian, I'm curious about artifact forging. Can you let me examine this blade and this whip for a period of time?" requested Qin Lie after being silent for a while.

Tu Ze shrugged and carelessly said, "It's a defective item, and it isn't as fitting as my original one. It's fine if you want to play with it."

"The spirit diagrams have not been completely inscribed, so it isn't really a spirit artifact. Take it, since it is scrap, you can do whatever." Zhuo Qian also expressed her attitude.

“Thanks.”

……

The next day.

Because Yao Tai was busy repairing spirit artifacts and did not have the time to teach him how to smelt artifacts, his days were very idle.

His contribution points were almost all used up; he could not borrow books from the Scripture Tower or refine his techniques in the cultivation room.

Because of this, there was nothing suitable for him to do at Nebula Pavilion lately.

He used an oilcloth to wrap the Dragon Bone Whip and the longblade before he quietly left Nebula Pavilion and walked towards Li’s Shop on Commerce Street.

Recently, after Yan Qingsong and Feng Kai’s wounds healed, they had become Yan Ziqian’s assistants, due to the threat of spirit beasts, and hunted alongside him. They were extremely well-known at the moment, and even Crimson Fire Association and Water Moon Sect would mention these three people.

As Yan Qingsong and Feng Kai were not in Icestone City, Qin Lie did not need to worry about anything unexpected on the road and

felt a bit of regret with how relaxed he was.

"You scamp, you've been in Nebula Pavilion and haven't come for a long time. Are you afraid of those two from Shattered Ice Manor?" When Qin Lie walked in, Li Mu's teasing voice sounded, "I heard that they had a terrible outcome while you didn't end up so bad."

"Uncle Li, how do you know?" Qin Lie was shocked.

"The girl that bought the Spirit Gathering Boards came to the store again. She saw your entire battle and mentioned it to me." Li Mu smiled. "That girl is very interested in the Spirit Gathering Boards and quoted a price of two Common Grade Seven spirit stones. Do you have any interest in getting some spirit stones?"

"Uh, how many spirit tablets are there that are usable?" Qin Lie asked.

Before he left last time, he had taken many spirit tablets to Nebula Pavilion to practice inscribing the Spirit Storage diagram.

The practice of a new spirit diagram consumed great amounts of materials, so he had already used lots of spirit tablets. Now that Uncle Li mentioned it, he recalled there might not be enough spirit tablets remaining.

"Not many left, just thirty five spirit tablets. If you are going to keep practicing inscribing spirit diagrams, you need to replenish

your spirit tablets," Li Mu said with a smile.

"It seems that I need to earn some more spirit stones." Qin Lie rubbed his head. He thought and then said, "If I add an Amplification diagram inside the Spirit Gathering Board, the rate at which the energy of the world is being gathered can be doubled. A stronger Spirit Gather Board should be more expensive, right?"

"You scamp." Li Mu snickered. "Practice as you want. I promise to take care of that and give you a satisfactory price!"

"Thanks, Uncle Li, I'm going back to my room to think about a problem." Qin Lie's smile was bright. Taking the oilcloth bundle with the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip, he walked towards the back yard. Just as he was going to leave the shop, he suddenly thought of something. He stopped in his steps and turned his head to look at Li Mu lazing on the chair. In a serious manner, he said, "I also have to thank Uncle Li for your great liquor."

Finished, he walked out and into the little room in the back.

Chapter 76: Mend

Inside the small house, Qin Lie was touching the longblade with his brows locked together.

The incomplete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside the longblade kept appearing inside his head. It made him incredibly antsy, and he couldn't help but feel a deep thirst — a thirst to mend that Spirit Gathering spirit diagram.

Dark Asura Hall's Great Master Lu had already inscribed the main diagram inside the longblade. The main nebula-shaped diagram was located at the core part of the longblade, and it could activate the star power inside the Stellar Iron to fully grant the longblade a marvellous power.

The Amplification spirit diagram was located inside the nebula diagram, and it was also finished and would increase the speed at which the main diagram's spirit energy ran.

The only problem was that only a very small part of the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was inscribed, so the main diagram inside was unable to draw in spirit energy. This longblade could not even be called a spirit artifact because of this problem.

"Since the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram cannot successfully merge with the main diagram, the main diagram cannot exert its true power. Hence, even if the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was forcefully inscribed inside, this spirit artifact cannot possibly be of high rank..."

These words came from Tu Ze, who answered the crux of the problem and explained why Great Master Lu did not finish the spirit diagram.

Qin Lie pressed a finger against the smooth surface of the longblade, directed a wisp of mind energy and consciousness into its interior, and examined the compound diagram's miraculous designs.

"From the looks of Great Master Lu's Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside Zhuo Qian's Dragon Bone Whip, it should be the same as the incomplete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside this longblade. Compared to the Spirit Gathering I know of, Great Master Lu's Spirit Gathering spirit diagram is simple and friable. Therefore, its Spirit Gathering effects are also... limited."

As Qin Lie continued to ponder, a thought floated in his mind, "Maybe if I mend this with the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram I know of, it may experience a new change?"

His eyes slowly brightened.

He immediately adjusted his breathing and heart rate, cleared out the jumbled thoughts in his head, and slowly sucked in a breath.

The finger pressing against the longblade's broadside abruptly glowed with the light of spirit energy!

Abruptly, his mind and consciousness connected with the spirit diagram inside the longblade. A tiny spot of light abruptly brightened inside the blade's interior world!

The spot of light appeared accurately at the breaking point of the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram.

The glowing spot slowly shifted, and where it had passed through, a new spirit line had clearly appeared on the surface.

Inside the house, Qin Lie had his eyes closed. There were obvious fluctuations of spirit energy around him. His fingertips glowed sharp like a needle as it slid across the blade's surface continuously.

Time passed slowly.

The sweat first appeared on his forehead before it slowly spread all over his entire body. His clothes were quickly drenched, and a trace of sickly white appeared on his ruddy complexion.

His spirit and mind energy were both expended at an unbelievable rate!

"Zzt!"

As if the lights had gone out, the light on his fingertips suddenly

disappeared. His body shuddered slightly as he abruptly opened his eyes.

The glowing longblade suddenly dimmed because he light on his fingertips had disappeared, and it now looked no different from common steel.

“S-so this is what you call inscribing diagrams on a spirit artifact…”

Qin Lie was shocked on the inside as he collapsed to the floor covered in sweat and stared blankly at the ceiling.

This was the first time he recognized the huge difference between inscribing a spirit diagram inside an artifact and on a spirit tablet.

To inscribe a spirit diagram inside a spirit tablet was like actually painting with a paint brush. A clear picture could be seen wherever the soft tip of a pen brushed through and ink spilled across the paper. It was an extremely easy and relaxing task that required almost no pause at all, so the person could never get too tired doing it.

But to inscribe a diagram inside an artifact was a completely different sensation. Not only was it not easy at all, it also expended a tremendous amount of mind and spirit energy!

To inscribe inside an artifact was akin to sculpting or carving on

top of wood or stone. Not only did it test one's skill and technique, it was also very demanding on one's strength.

The components of an artifact were created through the blending and smelting of spirit materials, and therefore, was much, much tougher than a spirit tablet. The spirit and mind energy spent during the process of inscribing a spirit diagram was leagues above inscribing on a spirit tablet!

With his current realm and spirit energy, he could very easily inscribe a complete Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside a spirit tablet in one go.

However, when he tried inscribing on a real artifact, not only did he nearly expend all of his spirit and mind energy, he had only managed to inscribe one fifth of the entire Spirit Gathering spirit diagram!

"No wonder they said that powerful artificers are often superb martial practitioners themselves. I guessed I finally learned why that was the case today." Qin Lie's expression was visibly moved. "Without a deep and refined pool of spirit energy, it would be completely impossible to complete the inscribing of a complex spirit diagram!"

He had already pushed his body past its limits, so he had no choice but to temporarily stop and recover using Spirit Recovering Pills.

"Qin Lie, you have haven't left your room for a full day, so get

out of there right now and make some food! Let's fill up our bellies first!" Just when his spirit energy had recovered by more than half, Li Mu's shout came from the outside.

"Yes, I'm coming." He pushed open the door and walked out.

"What happened?"

The sun was high and bright. A few small dishes were placed on the stone table in the shade of the small courtyard. Li Mu slowly sipped his wine as he frowned at Qin Lie's appearance.

Qin Lie gave a simple summary of the situation.

Li Mu appeared surprised and also seemed to be more spirited than usual. "You want to mend the spirit diagram of a defective artifact? Pretty interesting. Hm, this will definitely be quite the test of your skills alright. It's defective anyway, so even if it fails, it doesn't matter, so sure, go give it a try." He encouraged him.

Qin Lie sat down, drank some wine with Li Mu, and filled up his belly. He felt that his mood had improved quite a bit.

"Off you go. Do remember to take a small nap first though so you can recover your mind energy," Li Mu said understandingly.

When he went back into the small house, Qin Lie did not act immediately. Instead, he listened to Li Mu's advice and went to lie down for a little. When he woke up, he discovered that the sky was

already dark, but his mood was in fantastic condition.

So he immediately set to work...

And so, after a couple of periods of on-and-off sessions, on an early morning, he had finally inscribed the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram inside the longblade.

When he had clearly outlined the final spirit line, the main nebula-shaped diagram inside the longblade was like a galaxy that had been switched on as countless stars began to glitter one after another!

First, Qin Lie slipped a wisp of spirit energy into the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram. The spirit energy was like a river flowing in the diagram's gaps, and after it was slightly enhanced by the Amplification spirit diagram, its flowing even faster until both the spirit threads and the gaps seemed to shine with light...

Finally, the spirit energy was injected into the main diagram, and it caused a huge disturbance to occur inside the nebula-shaped diagram! The main diagram began to operate with extreme fluidity!

Looking at the longblade, one could see that many rice-sized star-like dots began to suddenly and rapidly appear on the blade's surface!

The few hundred star dots clustered together to form a nebula

pattern, and the nebula on the surface actually constantly fluctuated and even quietly shifted its position...

At this very moment, it was as if the longblade had come to life!

Qin Lie was absolutely ecstatic. He knew immediately that he had succeeded.

This was because he could very clearly sense that the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram he had inscribed did not conflict at all with the main nebula-shaped diagram when it directed spirit energy.

Not only there was no conflict, it even perfectly merged together and energized the main diagram with incredible effectiveness!

“Uncle Li, I did it, I did it!”

He rushed out of the small house with the longblade in hand and began dancing wildly in the courtyard; he couldn’t hold back his joy.

Li Mu walked in from the front of the shop, and with sharp eyes like thunder, he looked at the longblade, grinned, and extended his hand. “Let me have a look.”

Qin Lie subsequently handed the longblade over.

Li Mu accepted the longblade and felt it with narrowed eyes. He immediately broke into surprised laughter and yelled at Qin Lie, “My word, kid, are you trying to dominate the other artificer? Why is is that the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram you inscribed has taken in the other artificer’s main diagram instead? Originally, the Spirit Gathering and Amplification spirit diagrams were meant to be placed inside the main diagram and act as support.”

He held a strange expression on his face as he continued, “But after you tinkered with it, the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram has been expanded at least seven or eight times its original size and wrapped in the other party’s Amplification and main diagram instead. Now it looks like your Spirit Gathering spirit diagram is the main diagram, and the rest of his diagrams are just acting as support.”

Qin Lie himself was feeling embarrassed. “Even if you add up both that artificer’s main and Amplification spirit diagrams together, you couldn’t even get seven hundred spirit lines, and they all looked really simple and shoddy. The Spirit Gathering spirit diagram I added on later was formed with more than three thousand spirit threads, and because he had inscribed a rudimentary shape of it later on, I couldn’t shrink everything at the early stages and had no choice but to build according to his scale. As a result, well, um, it turned out this way. I didn’t really have a choice, you know?”

Normally speaking, a spirit diagram’s size can be freely controlled by the artificer.

Take the Spirit Gathering spirit diagram for example. Qin Lie

could expand it as wide as ten acres of land or shrink it completely into the size of a palm.

On principle, the power of a spirit diagram had no direct correlation with its size.

That was to say, the effects of a ten-acre-wide Spirit Gathering spirit diagram and a palm-wide Spirit Gathering spirit diagram was exactly the same. They would gather spirit energy only.

If the spirit artifact was larger, then the spirit diagram inscribed would also be larger. If it was smaller, then the spirit diagram must also be shrunk down as well, but the effect of the spirit diagram was still the same.

It didn't matter if it was enlarged or shrunk. This was all done to perfectly fit it with the spirit artifact.

Sometimes, a fine spirit diagram could be harder to inscribe and more testing of the level of an artificer.

It was rumored that a powerful artificer could even inscribe a few composite diagrams in the interior of a small needle.

"Heh, if the original artificer knew that you have turned his main diagram into support, then he'll probably be mad enough to spit blood." Li Mu smiled lightly. "On the other hand, it isn't necessarily a bad thing for this spirit artifact..."

“Li Mu, can this longblade now… be considered a spirit artifact?” Qin Lie’s expression was excited.

“Of course, of course it counts as one. In fact, this is a spirit artifact with a very specific purpose. As for its ranking, it’ll have to be determined through its components and how fast the spirit energy flows, the power it can create, the limits of endurance, and so on. I don’t have any tools here, and only places like Armament Pavilion can lend a professional opinion, so I can’t tell you what rank it is.”

Li Mu stroked his chin and thought for a little while before smiling. “This is definitely a spirit artifact alright, but you did not complete this independently. The majority of its merit is not on you because all you did is repair it at a latter stage. Right, if you want to know how well it performs, you will still have to return this to your friend and let him use his corresponding spirit art to test it out. Only then will you know if it truly suits him or not so you can verify your success.”

“There is still a Dragon Bone Whip with the same problem; the Amplification diagram and main diagram are in conflict with each other.” Qin Lie chuckled.

“Keep up the good work then, and work faster this time since you’ve gained a little experience,” said Li Mu. “I’ll help arrange your meals so you don’t need to worry about it. Just go; I want to see how big of a success you can achieve this time.”

“Uncle Li, thank you,” Qin Lie said sincerely.

“Save it.” Li Mu waved his hands nonchalantly.

……

Chapter 77: Trade

With the experience from mending the longblade's diagram, Qin Lie now had a pretty good idea on what to do when he mended the Dragon Bone Whip.

This time, he consciously organized his time and split the process into five stages. On each stage, he would mend only one fifth of the Amplification diagram, and after using nearly seven days of time, he had finally mended the Dragon Bone Whip's Amplification diagram completely.

"The main diagram of this Dragon Bone Whip can condense wind energy, and it should be suitable for people who cultivate wind type art formulas. Hmm, wait, that's not right; there's also a bit of the flexibility of water. It looks like the spirit art your friend cultivates is pretty mixed. To mix water in wind, huh? Yeah, I suppose a custom-made spirit artifact is necessary. No wonder your friend would be looking for someone to have it specially made."

Inside the courtyard, Li Mu held the Dragon Bone Whip Qin Lie had just mended and gave it a casual wave.

There was a sudden gust of wind in the courtyard, and a circle of gray blew over and actually became attached onto the Dragon Bone Whip.

When the Dragon Bone Whip was waved, it drove the thick gray wind to form a wind barrier which encircled the body of the whip.

At first glance, it would seem as if the Dragon Bone Whip had transformed into a Wind Dragon, and it even did all sorts of stunning attacking poses. Moreover, every one of these poses were incredibly lifelike, mimicking the flying jump of a dragon.

“Great show there Uncle Li,” Qin Lie cheered.

“It was only two careless swings, nothing to fuss over,” Li Mu replied in surprise. Then, he returned the Dragon Bone Whip to him and said, “This is the same situation as the longblade; your Amplification spirit diagram has overtaken the others again. Your one Amplification spirit diagram is more complex than the original Artificer’s main diagram, Spirit Gathering diagram, and Spirit Storage diagram put together, so they were all enclosed by your Amplification spirit diagram. Let me put it this way. Your Amplification spirit diagram has become the core of this Dragon Bone Whip, and it has greatly enhanced its ability to condense the power of wind.”

The mended Dragon Bone Whip appeared to be grayish-brown in color. It was slippery to the touch and felt like holding a snake in one’s hands.

Qin Lie really disliked the sensation. “This feels really weird; it’s so slippery to touch and doesn’t really feel comfortable. I wonder if Sister Qian would like it. I sure don’t think much of it personally.”

“The master of the Dragon Bone Whip’s wind type art formula has the power of water inside it, and water is slippery, so she

should like that sensation a lot." Li Mu smiled a little. "The fellow who created this Dragon Bone Whip does have some skill; he had taken the user's every aspect into consideration. This slippery feeling is a flair of originality deliberately made to fit the user, so you don't have to worry that your friend won't like it."

"Both the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip have had their spirit diagrams mended. But I have to wonder what their ranks are and if Big Brother Tu and Sister Qian could actually use them? I wonder if it could replace the spirit artifacts they're using right now..." Qin Lie thought silently.

"Oh, right. While you were mending the whip's diagram, that girl in white and the old servant had come by, and they are still asking about the Spirit Gathering Boards." Li Mu raised his eyebrows and smiled lightly. "That girl seems to be very concerned about the Spirit Gathering Boards. It is probably because of the Spirit Gathering Board's ability to gather the world's spirit energy, and it just so happened that it can help her in some way. She must have a need in this aspect right now, so... she came over and offered a price herself."

"Oh?" Qin Lie's expression shook as he smiled,"What price?"

"Three Common Grade Seven spirit stones." Li Mu chuckled. "I've already told her that I would have new stock in a few days, so she should come again pretty soon. Hmm, there's no need for you to rush back to Nebula Pavilion right now. Go and make some enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Board. There should be no problem at all if we sell it at five Common Grade Seven spirit stones.

“Alright.” Qin Lie nodded his head happily.

Basically, the so-called enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Board was made from adding an Amplification diagram on top of the foundation of the Spirit Gathering Boards.

—For the current Qin Lie, this task wasn’t difficult at all, and it wouldn’t take too much spirit or mind energy to create either.

Therefore, to ensure that he had enough spirit stones to use in the future and to be able to buy more spirit tablets, he temporarily stayed inside the shop and used the remaining spirit tablets to create the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards.

Four days later.

Out of the remaining thirty five spirit tablets, thirty two had been turned into the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards. The remaining three failed after experiencing some minor mistakes when the Spirit Gathering diagram and Amplification diagram were forcefully mixed together.

On the fifth day, the woman in white showed up as expected.

The woman whose clothes were whiter than snow prettily stood in front of the shop and drew a beautiful scenery around her. It was as if the world had suddenly become attractive.

A trace of anticipation leaked from her crystal-like pupils. “Have the Spirit Gathering Boards arrived yet?”

“They’ve arrived.” Li Mu gave a smile and nodded towards the shop at Qin Lie, signalling him to come out and present them.

Both the eyes of the woman dressed in white and the old servant lit up a little. It seemed that they valued the Spirit Gathering Boards greatly, and they both took the opportunity to look towards Qin Lie.

“This is the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards. Compared to the original, this one gathers the world’s spirit energy two times faster!” Qin Lie gave them each a board, then activated the diagrams inside the spirit boards. As it began to glow with a misty blue luster, the world’s spirit energy around them began to flow visibly towards this location.

The amount of nature spirit energy gathered by the two spirit boards was two times faster than what it normally would be in the shop!

Previously, this could only be accomplished through the use of four Spirit Gathering Boards.

“Enhanced version…”

Both the woman dressed in white and the old servant’s eyes grew brighter and brighter. They gave each other a look and appeared to

be slightly excited.

Immediately, they too activated the enhanced version of Spirit Gathering Boards in their hands and carefully felt the changes within.

A long time later, the woman in white's expression turned serious as she exclaimed with a cool voice, "How many spirit stones?"

"Five Common Grade Seven spirit stones!" Qin Lie exclaimed in a low tone and tightened his fists in secret. He was also feeling anxious and was filled with anticipation.

If all thirty two spirit boards could be sold, then it will amount to a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones!

A single Common Grade Seven spirit stone could be exchanged for twenty five spirit tablets, and he could exchange a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones for a total of four thousand spirit tablets!

Four thousand spirit tablets!

When he practiced the Spirit Gathering, Amplification, and Spirit Storage spirit diagrams, he had only spent over a thousand spirit tablets. This meant that if this business was successful, he wouldn't have to worry about spirit boards for at least one or two years!

“Okay, I’ll take everything!” the woman dressed in white barely gave it a thought before she nodded immediately after. She even added, “How much you have equals to how much I want. As long you have them in stock, I’ll take them all.”

Qin Lie was so excited that his entire body was shaking. Even his gaze on the lady in white had blazed up all of a sudden.

“Ahem!”

Li Mu shot him a glare and scolded him on the inside that the kid was not living up to his expectations. It was only a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones and he was excited to this degree? This was simply too embarrassing.

“For now, this is all we have. It’s not easy for me to come by a shipment, so if you truly have heart, then you may visit often and ask. Who knows, maybe there will be new stock then.”

“Here are thirty two Profound Grade One spirit stones, which is the equivalent of a hundred and sixty Common Grade Seven spirit stones. Please keep it well.”

The old servant pointed towards the table, and crystal clear fist-sized rocks, that were like diamonds, rolled out into the open,

They rolled out before Qin Lie’s eyes.

Each rock was of the same size and possessed a misty glow. When he moved closer, he could see that the rocks were very transparent.

—These were real Profound Grade spirit stones!

These Profound Grade spirit stones were exactly what Manifestation and Netherpassage Realm martial practitioners would use. Spirit stones of this grade were the true currency used by high level forces.

“Qin Lie, do put away the things first,” Li Mu said loudly.

His eyes shining, Qin Lie let out a silly giggle twice before he smilingly put the Profound Grade One spirit stones properly into the cabinet beneath the table.

“If I can create enough enhanced Spirit Gathering Boards, then maybe I can buy myself a spatial ring...” He was already making calculations inside his heart, and with his eyes still sparkling with energy he thought, “Back at Ling Town, that Lu Li from Seven Fiends Valley had carried herself in an arrogant manner and looked down on me. But even she... did not have a spatial ring on her hands, did she?”

“The spirit art you’re cultivating is pretty special; it appears to be thunder and lightning. Young man, your special spirit art may be of use to us in certain aspects, are you interested in coming on a trip with us outside the city? Do not worry, I can assure you that it will be much better than working here as an apprentice, and there will be some benefits for you as well,” suddenly said the old

servant after closely examining Qin Lie.

“Not interested,” Qin Lie immediately rejected. In his opinion, creating the enhanced version of the Spirit Gathering Boards beats any benefits right now.

“Do you really not want to consider?” The old servant frowned.

“Nope!” Qin Lie affirmed his decision.

“Let’s go.” The woman in white nodded her head before sweeping a glance over Qin Lie.

Her cool gaze stayed a bit longer at the nebula pattern on the chest area of Qin Lie’s clothes before she meaningfully said, “We will meet again very soon.” Once she said that, only then did she and the old servant turn around and leave Li’s Shop.

“This girl is incredibly beautiful, and her abilities... are just as extraordinary. It also seems that she is slightly interested in the art formula you’re cultivating.” Li Mu proceeded to curl up atop his recliner again, and he spoke while rocking in comfort, “Are you telling me that you’re not interested at all in such a beautiful young lady?”

“No.” A gentle and elegant figure quietly appeared in his mind as he shook his head.

“I don’t believe you.” Li Mu’s gaze was teasing. “There are almost

no kids in this world who aren't attracted by the other sex. Either you already have someone in your heart or you're abnormal. When your Uncle Li was about your age, hehe, I have zero immunity on this aspect, so I guess I was notorious..."

Qin Lie's interest was immediately piqued as he said full of energy, "Tell me the details!"

"You scamp, you're still telling me you're not interested?" Li Mu looked dumbfounded before he waved his hands. "Now scram. Uncle Li has so many love debts it'll take forever to finish. Too lazy."

"Someone who looks so dirty with a year-long smell like Uncle Li can actually have many love debts?" Qin Lie marveled with a strange expression. "I guess those women who hooked up with Uncle Li should have... quite the heavy taste."

"Cough cough! Cough cough..." Li Mu suddenly coughed loudly as if he had choked on something.

On the same evening, Qin Lie carried the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip in a oilcloth and left Li's Shop for Nebula Pavilion.

"Qin Lie, Elder Han had said to immediately invite you home once you got back!" The guard immediately informed him with a serious expression when he saw him return.

Qin Lie shuddered once, and his eyes abruptly brightened as he

thought to himself: Could it be that there is news of Grandpa?

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Chapter 78: Inspector

Qin Lie was full of expectation as he hurried to Han Qingrui's side, a sliver of hope appearing between his brows.

"Qin Lie, you brat, you have finally returned!" exclaimed Han Qingrui who was standing at the door. He seemingly had been waiting specifically for Qin Lie considering that soon as he saw Qin Lie, he immediately became excited and began to shout loudly.

"Uncle Han, is it that there is news of my grandpa?"

"No."

"Then is there mail for me?"

"Nope."

"Then why were you anxiously looking for me?" asked Qin Lie, extremely crestfallen.

"Come in first before we talk," said Han Qingrui with a respectful expression. Only after Qin Lie entered did he whisper, "The Pavilion Master is also here. When you speak, you must be careful."

"Pavilion Master?" asked Qin Lie, his expression slightly changing. "What happened?"

“There is someone who wanted to meet you. This person… is not someone who Nebula Pavilion can slight, and thus, the Pavilion Master personally accompanied them.” After Han Qingrui entered the house, he also seemed to have become cautious as he quietly whispered an explanation while he brought Qin Lie to the inner room.

Inside the room, a robust, imposing looking man, upon seeing Qin Lie walking over, smiled as he said, “You must be Qin Lie? I have heard Tu Ze talking about you a lot. Mn, I am Tu Mo.”

“Well met, Pavilion Master,” replied Qin Lie as he bowed his body in salute.

“You do not need to regard me as a stranger. Come meet our guest from Dark Asura Hall. They specifically wanted to see you.” Tu Mo waved his hand, afterwards, inclining his body to expose the person behind him.

“I said before that we would quickly meet again,” said a clear, cold voice.

A lady clothed in clothes whiter than snow was currently sitting atop Han Qingrui’s usual spot with an indifferent expression.

Her servant with that slouched body, as before, was still standing beside her like a shadow. At this time, he laughed as he observed Qin Lie with relish. “Kid, you are wearing the uniform of Nebula Pavilion, how could you possibly escape from the palms of our

hands?”

Qin Lie furrowed his brows.

“This lady is Xie Jingxuan. She hails from Dark Asura Hall,” explained Tu Mo. “She has some things for which she requires your assistance. Mn, you just follow her around for a while. Come back after you finish your job.”

“Dark Asura Hall...” said Qin Lie, pondering over the meaning within Tu Mo’s words. Looking at the white clothed lady, who was called Xie Jingxuan, again, he could only helplessly nod. “Understood. I shall follow Pavilion Master’s instructions and try my best to help her.”

Tu Mo laughed, nodding as he said, “My little brother constantly talks about you and evaluates you highly. Don’t let me down.”

Qin Lie bitterly laughed as he nodded.

“I heard that you are apprenticed at Li’s Shop on Commerce Street, and that Li’s Shop has begun to sell some kind of extremely rare Spirit Gathering Board...” Tu Mo deliberately emphasized a few words before he began to laugh loudly, saying, “Qin Lie, please also help Nebula Pavilion get some Spirit Gathering Boards. Nebula Pavilion will purchase them at the same price.”

Qin Lie was stunned.

“Look, if Nebula Pavilion’s cultivating grounds could be completely full of dense spirit energy of the world, wouldn’t it be very beneficial towards raising the practitioners within the pavilion?” asked Tu Mo, his eyes shining, “That kind of Spirit Gathering Board doesn’t have a great effect towards individuals, but it is extremely suited towards Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor, and other forces of the sort. It can allow the cultivating grounds to rise to a new level.”

“Pavilion Master Tu, I did not tell you about the matter of the Spirit Gathering Boards so that you could fight over the goods with me,” unhappily said Xie Jingxuan, frowning.

“Haha, I was only casually bringing it up so that Qin Lie could watch out for me,” embarrassedly said Tu Mo while laughing loudly.

“You returned very quickly. Mn, thus I will give you two hours of time. After two hours, you will leave with us,” indifferently said Xie Jingxuan as she looked at Qin Lie.

“Okay, I will go now and prepare,” tactfully responded Qin Lie before once again turning to Tu Mo and saying, “About the matter of Spirit Gathering Boards, I will pay attention to it. Once I return, I will talk about it with Uncle Li...” Only then did Qin Lie leave the room.

“Kid, how come you seem so reluctant?” As he had left, Han Qingrui had left with him. Smiling, Han Qingrui patted Qin Lie’s shoulders, asking, “For them to pay attention to you, that is your blessing. You should be happy.”

“What is there to be happy about…” muttered Qin Lie. From his point of view, this time that he was about to spend doing hard work would have been better spent refining a few more Spirit Gathering Boards. Slightly narrowing his brows, he then curiously asked, “What’s her identity and status? Even if she’s someone from Dark Asura Hall, there surely isn’t a need for the Pavilion Master to personally accompany her, right?”

When Xie Jingxuan’s origins were brought up, Han Qingrui’s expression became solemn. He didn’t immediately reply, instead leading Qin Lie along. Only when they arrived at a secluded area did he reply, “Naturally, ordinary people of Dark Asura Hall don’t have the qualifications to control our affairs, and the Pavilion Master wouldn’t bother paying attention to them. However, she… came over with Dark Asura Hall’s Inspector Command Token.”

“Inspector Command Token?” lightly asked Qin Lie.

“The right to dispatch and control people from vassal forces belongs to Dark Asura Hall’s Department of Internal Affairs. With the Inspector Command Token present, she can dispatch the people of Nebula Pavilion, Shattered Ice Manor, Crimson Flame Association, and Water Moon Sect. As long as it’s a force under the control of Dark Asura Hall, she can directly request and take people.” Han Qingrui laughed bitterly, continuing, “Not just you, even if she wanted me to go along, I would have to as well.”

“Such great authority?” responded Qin Lie, astonished.

“What did you think?” Han Qingrui looked at Qin Lie, then continued, “Otherwise, why would the Pavilion Master have personally come out to receive them? You know, the Pavilion Master’s father… elder brother Tu is the commander of Dark Asura Hall, and thus he himself has a certain status. Many Dark Asura Hall people who come over all pay their respects to the Pavilion Master. However, Dark Asura Hall’s Inspector is a truly powerful figure. Thus, the Pavilion Master couldn’t help but do as he was told.”

Similar to Nebula Pavilion, the divisions between people within Dark Asura Hall was extremely clear. The only difference was that, rather than calling their ranks Hall Masters, Elders, Vice Pavilion Masters, and Pavilion Master, they called them Generals, Enforcers, Commanders, Five Hall Masters, and First Hall Master instead.

Upon entering Dark Asura Hall, one would only be an ordinary General. Only after accumulating a certain amount of merit would they be promoted to the position of Enforcer, then Commander, one of the Five Hall Master, and finally First Hall Master.

Inspector wasn’t included within these ranks and instead belonged to the Department of Internal Affairs — this was the most peculiar organization of Dark Asura Hall.

The power of of Dark Asura Hall’s Department of Internal Affairs was comparable to the combined power of Ye Yangqiu and Han Qingrui within Nebula Pavilion. Not only was it responsible for collecting tribute from vassal forces, it was also responsible for controlling the actions of vassal forces.

The position known as Inspector only answered to the First Hall Master and was the sharpest, most powerful blade controlled by the First Hall Master!

Thus, the Department of Internal Affairs was a very special existence within Dark Asura Hall. The power of the Inspector which came from within was extremely great, and they could even directly kill commanders as well as directly take control of vassal forces' martial practitioners.

After listening to Han Qingrui's explanation, Qin Lie was inwardly shocked. He never expected that the white clothed woman who had frequented Li's Shop and named such a high price for the Spirit Gathering Boards would possess such a background.

"No wonder the servant even has a spatial ring. So that's how it is." Upon understanding the reasons, Qin Lie could only accept his fate. Thinking it over within his mind, he concluded that next time he sold Spirit Gathering Boards upon returning, he would have to slightly raise the price. "What about Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian? I need to find them. I have things to return to them," subconsciously asked Qin Lie, remembering his original purpose.

"They left several days ago, going outside Icestone City to hunt and kill spirit beasts. Kang Zhi and Han Feng also went," explained Han Qingrui. "Ah! The situation outside isn't very good recently. Because the pavilion didn't have enough hands, those brats weren't able to evade their responsibilities and had to expend their energy for the pavilion."

“So it’s like that…”

Qin Lie furrowed his brows. He had planned to let Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian test the effects of longblade and Dragon Bone Whip which were currently covered by a oil cloth to see if they would mesh well with their respective weapons. He never expected that the two of them wouldn’t be present.

As it was, he had nothing much to prepare. All of his possessions were already all on his person.

“That woman’s over here in Elder Han Qingrui’s area.”

“Is she really that beautiful?”

“Nonsense. I only glanced at her and I can already ensure you that within the entire Icestone City, you will not find a woman more beautiful than her!”

“Then we seriously need to check it out!”

“……”

While Qin Lie and Han Qingrui were having their secluded conversation, a group of several people sneakily walked over, discussing amongst themselves as they shrunk into the corner of a wall nearby and headed towards Han Qingrui’s study.

Amongst them was Wei Xing's son, Wei Li, along with a few other arrogant youths of Nebula Pavilion. They all came because of Xie Jingxuan.

"I heard that it's a powerful figure from Dark Asura Hall. Everyone observe from afar and make sure to not say anything. Care for our little lives."

"Understood. Towards someone from Dark Asura Hall, who dares to be rude and waste their life?"

"Mn, just looking is enough."

As the group of youths whispered to each other, they carefully hid themselves, aiming their lines of sight towards the doorway.

"They truly don't know how high the sky is and how thick the earth is," said Han Qingrui, bitterly laughing. Because of their remote location, those several youths had not noticed them. "Luckily, Kang Zhi and Han Feng, those two brats, left long ago. Otherwise, they might also have thoughts along these lines as well. If they got into any trouble, it would truly be hard to clean up," muttered Han Qingrui.

"Han Feng and Kang Zhi are also like this?" asked Qin Lie, laughing.

"They are worse if anything, those two bastards!" snorted Han Qingrui.

After a while, Xie Jingxuan's pure body quietly appeared from the door with the robust and imposing Tu Mo following behind her. As the two talked, they waited at the entrance for something.

When Xie Jingxuan came out, the eyes of Wei Li and the other youths who had shrunk into the corner all looked directly ahead, each pair of eyes showing shock one after the other, as if they had seen the most beautiful person in the world. They all became dazed and at a loss.

"They are waiting for you," said Han Qingrui, chuckling.

"Qin Lie!" Tu Mo's eyes were like a torch as they immediately swept over. Motioning at Qin Lie, he said, "Seeing how relaxed you are, you shouldn't have anything to do. Then, why don't you leave a bit earlier and not have our guests wait on you any longer."

Xie Jingxuan also looked over as she indifferently said, "If there's nothing, then let us leave.

Qin Lie sighed as he helplessly walked out alongside Han Qingrui. While Wei Li and the rest's eyeballs had fallen out, he arrived besides Xie Jingxuan. After thinking for a moment, he took out the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip from within the grease cloth, saying, "Pavilion Master, these are Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's possessions. When they return, please return them for me."

"No need. You can bring them with you," said Tu Mo, slightly distracted. Immediately, he waved his hand, refusing to accept the

two as he said, “During your trip… you should encounter Tu Ze and Little Qian. You can give those to them yourself.”

“Hn?” Qin Lie’s face was full of surprise.

“Ha, you will be fine, just leave with them,” said Tu Mo vaguely as he chuckled. He then instructed, “Kid, focus a bit. Don’t mess around. This will benefit your future.”

“Alright then,” responded Qin Lie as he nodded.

“Let’s leave,” said Xie Jingxuan, furrowing her brows. She seemed impatient as she began to walk directly towards Nebula Pavilion’s exit.

“Let’s go, kid,” snorted the old servant.

Helplessly, Qin Lie, carrying the oilcloth which contained the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip along with a leather bag at his hip, left with the old servant in this manner.

Like an even more minor servant.

However, a look of envy appeared on the faces of Wei Li and the other youths of Nebula Pavilion as their eyes all glowed.

“That guy called Qin Lie, just what kind of lucky dogshit did he walk through? Why was he specifically picked?” quietly cried one

of them.

“The devil knows. It makes me so f*cking upset. Ah! Why couldn’t it be me?”

“He’s only cannon fodder to be sent to his death, hmph!” lowly snorted Wei Li.

As they quietly cried and complained, Pavilion Master Tu Mo had already long since left. From start to finish, he hadn’t noticed they were there.

“What are you all talking about here?” suddenly asked Han Qingrui, his expression cold as he strangely laughed. “Don’t think that you can avoid this, just wait. You all are already on the list. The next request and you all are going out of the city too.

After his remark, the faces of the several youths all became frozen as they began to bitterly beg, begging Han Qingrui to be magnanimous.

“Even Tu Ze has gone into battle. My precious son Han Feng was also dispatched. Do you brats really think you can barely escape it?” snorted Han Qingrui. Curling his lips, he indifferently said, “Let me give you a bit of advice. If you wish to survive longer, you will need to spend more time within the cultivating grounds and less time in places of temptation.”

However, he didn’t tell Wei Li and the rest about just how grim

the recent situation outside had become. Nor did he tell them how the death count for Nebula Pavilion was nearing one hundred people as of late.

He was afraid he would scare them.

……

Chapter 79: Ghost Bird And Profound Nether Beast

When he walked out of Icestone City and looked into the distance, his expression suddenly turned serious.

There wasn't a living person to be seen in the usually crowded main street. In fact, when he looked afar, he could see a few skeletal remains.

Some of the bones were somewhat larger and obviously a spirit beast's. A few of them were distinctively human as well.

The sun was hidden, both sky and earth covered by thick layers of cloud. The land covered in gray and scattered bones depicted a picture of desolation and loneliness.

He could still remember the first time he had arrived at Icestone City. The city gates near the main street were pretty crowded, and there would be numerous martial practitioners and normal men from vassal forces, such as the Ling Family, who would visit Icestone City. Everyday there would be massive traffic at the city gates, and sometimes the sheer number of people entering and exiting the gates could cause a traffic jam.

However, the city gate was completely deserted right now, and not a single soul could be seen on the main street.

"Fwee..."

That old servant, who was called Liang Zhong, suddenly and loudly whistled after he exited the city.

The whistling sound resounded along with the blowing wind into the great distance; its reverberation still echoing.

“Swoosh Swoosh Swoosh!” The flapping sounds of a bird appeared from the thick clouds above their heads.

Qin Lie lifted his head and saw seven to eight birds of the same green color circling above them. Because they were too far apart, he could not clearly identify their shapes, but he did guess that they had come because of Liang Zhong’s whistling.

Liang Zhong lifted his head a let out a chuckle. Then, he whistled again.

A bird suddenly dove downwards like a bolt of green lightning before landing on top of Liang Zhong’s shoulders. It even let out a strange sound as if it were speaking something into his ear.

Qin Lie turned his head to look, slightly started, and softly exclaimed, “W-what kind of a bird is this?”

When it was closer and he could get a clear look at it, he saw that the bird was about the size of his palm, and it glowed faintly green in color. Not only that, its face… was clearly that of a young child’s!

The ghastly green little bird looked like a sinister soul. It had the small face of a child, yet it had a sharp beak and eyes that rolled around freely, giving him a very bizarre and eerie feeling.

“This is a tamed Ghost Bird. They are small creatures that you can find in Nether Battlefield, and they are my eyes.” Liang Zhong gave him a simple explanation before continuing to listen closely at the Ghost Bird’s chirps. It took a while before he finally nodded, and the Ghost Bird abruptly flew away like a wisp of a green ghost, flashing above the clouds in the sky.

“Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh!”

A series of rapid, sweeping sounds came from not too far away. While Qin Lie was waiting, two spirit beasts covered entirely in green scutes suddenly appeared beside Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong like the breeze.

The two spirit beasts shared a very similar aura to the Ghost Bird. It was strange and chilly. Its body covered in green scutes gave it the appearance of a rhino at first glance, but it was even bigger than one, and its eyes were also ghastly green. The mere sight of it sent shivers down people’s hearts.

“Profound Nether Beast, also a spirit beast of the Nether Battlefield. It is very different from those in the Arctic Mountain Range.” Liang Zhong loosely explained, “The Ghost Bird is only a Rank One spirit beast, so its combat capabilities are pretty lacking. But it is incredibly convenient and useful for information

gathering and scouting from up in the sky. These two Profound Nether Beasts are only Rank Two, but they run incredibly fast and are the perfect tools for traveling long distances. If you have a Profound Nether Beast to ride on your journey, then it's but a cinch to travel tens of thousands of miles."

While he was speaking, Xie Jingxuan's lithe figure danced upwards like a blade of a willow leaf before landing steadily on top of a Profound Nether Beast.

Liang Zhong himself rode atop the other Profound Nether Beast and nodded towards Qin Lie. "Come on up. You will sit with me."

Qin Lie obeyed and came over. Grabbing Liang Zhong's hands, he then sat on top of the Profound Nether Beast.

"Grab my waist," Liang Zhong exclaimed in a low tone.

Qin Lie cooperated obediently.

"Whoosh Whoosh!"

The Profound Nether Beast beneath him suddenly rushed forward and galloped like a bolt of cold lightning. All Qin Lie could hear was the sound of the wind whipping past his ears, and for a moment, his heart raced.

"Both the Ghost Birds and the Profound Nether Beasts are spirit beasts from the Nether Battlefield. If they had appeared inside

Icestone City, it might have caused some panic, so we left them outside." Liang Zhong's explanation came over through the howlings of the wind, and although it wasn't very loud, Qin Lie could clearly hear every word.

The two Profound Nether Beasts traveled forward with considerable speed. The scenery around them kept flying towards the back as it all quickly passed by.

Gradually, Qin Lie had gotten used to the Profound Nether Beast's speed, and when he concentrated on the periphery he realized that he could see the occasional traces of battle and the remains of a few spirit beasts. But he seldom saw any corpses of martial practitioners at all.

"The masters of Dark Asura Hall and Seven Fiends Valley had brought the backbone of their subordinates and are active around the Arctic Mountain Range. Some of their experts have already entered deep into the Arctic Mountain Range and attacked some high rank spirit beasts. The spirit beasts that operate around Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City are usually lower ranked ones – mostly rank one or twos – and the people who were responsible to clean them up were also low level juniors."

While Liang Zhong was hurrying on his way with Qin Lie, he began to introduce randomly, "The three Elders from your Nebula Pavilion, Du Haitian, Chu Yan, and Wei Xing had brought their hall masters to the edge of the Arctic Mountain Range to combine forces with Crimson Flame Association and Water Moon Sect's Elders in order to cooperate with Dark Asura Hall and Seven

Fiends Valley's mission..."

His demeanor was careless, and he just said whatever was on the top off his head without really explaining in great detail, but on the whole, Qin Lie understood what he was saying.

The really high ranking spirit beasts in the Arctic Mountain Range would still be inside the mountain range and the outer edge of the range. Those who went into the Arctic Mountain Range were true masters from Seven Fiends Valley and Dark Asura Hall. The ranks of spirit beasts on the outer edge of the Arctic Mountain Range would be slightly lower – about rank two or so – and Elders from Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Flame Association, and Water Moon Sect would be responsible to hunt them down with their men.

And outside of the Arctic Mountain Range, the spirit beasts that operated around Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City were just rank one or two.

These low level spirit beasts would fall under the responsibility of Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, Yan Ziqian, and other juniors to bring some allies of the Refinement Realm to clear them out.

"I don't see many bodies of martial practitioners?" Qin Lie suddenly asked after the Profound Nether Beast sped along for a little while.

"The reason there aren't many martial practitioner corpses isn't because we're holding an advantage, but rather... those who died

were usually torn apart and eaten by spirit beasts which is why you don't see many corpses around here." Liang Zhong frowned. "To those spirit beasts, a martial practitioner's body is a great nourishing medicine. They find the flesh and blood forged out of the concentrated spirit energy of the world extremely tasty, and it can also increase both their strength and ranks. To them, our corpses carry a similar effect to spirit pills."

"Many people had died?" Qin Lie's expression changed slightly.

"Nebula Pavilion has lost over a hundred men, and both Shattered Ice Manor and Water Moon Sect have experienced similar losses. Crimson Flames' are a bit worse..." Liang Zhong looked into the distance and indifferently said, "It was a spirit beast that was close to breaking through to Rank Three. It broke through the defensive line at the outer edge of the Arctic Mountain Range and entered the perimeter around Crimson Flame City. Crimson Flame Association had been careless and did not send out a true expert to hunt it down, and it caused a few squads to be annihilated which resulted in the death of tens of people."

Qin Lie was moved on the inside.

"Because they didn't move into the city early on, the vassal forces of Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon Sect also lost a few hundred men." Liang Zhong then said, "It is perfectly normal for people to die. Every year there are countless Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners who lose their lives, so this is hardly surprising at all. It would be a real surprise if no one died."

The strange chirps of the Ghost Birds suddenly rang out from

above the sky, and one of them suddenly dropped down and landed on Liang Zhong's shoulders.

The two Profound Nether Beasts simultaneously slowed down .

After listening for a while, Liang Zhong looked to the left, and with a slight frown, said, "Miss, there is a Rank Two Golden Crag Beast operating in a village in that direction."

"Is there anyone else left in the village?" Xie Jingxuan asked.

"There is." Liang Zhong nodded.

"Haven't we sent out a notice for Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon Sect to move their vassal forces into the city? Why are there still people outside?" Xie Jingxuan seemed to be suppressing her anger as she said that.

"Some people decided to leave it to chance and believed that their own village would not be invaded by spirit beasts. Some people are old, and it could be that they didn't feel like moving anymore, or they couldn't move in time..." Liang Zhong explained.

"Let's give it a look." Xie Jingxuan let out a soft sigh.

The two Profound Nether Beasts abruptly changed directions, and soon, they were moving fast once more. An hour later, they had arrived at a very secluded village on top of their Profound Nether Beasts.

The village had only about twenty households, and at first glance, the place was completely dead with no sound of life whatsoever. The fields had been abandoned long ago, and they were overgrown with weeds.

A Ghost Bird landed on top of a southeastern household from the sky.

The Profound Nether Beasts rushed towards that direction.

A thick scent of blood hung in the air, and there were pools of blood all over the ground. But there were no bodies.

It took only one look for Qin Lie to come to the realization that there were people who stayed behind in these households, and they were all eaten by the Golden Crag Beast which was why there were no corpses to be found.

“We were late.” Liang Zhong shook his head, called his Ghost Bird over again, and asked for a moment before saying, “The Golden Crag Beast had left and entered a natural stone forest towards the front. The stone forest is situated almost at the center of the area between Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon city. It is dozens of miles wide, and there was a lot of spirit beast activity in the area. Many juniors would hunt for beasts there, so it is quite the lively place.”

“Let’s go.” Xie Jingxuan’s expression was indifferent, and after a slight nod, she led the way with her Profound Nether Beast and left

this desolate village.

“Hmm, if there are no surprises, then this Tu Ze and his group that you’re looking for should be inside that stone forest,” said Liang Zhong after releasing his Ghost Bird.

Qin Lie’s brows lifted slightly, and he unconsciously felt for the oilcloth that contained the longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip, asking, “Why did you specifically seek me out? Exactly how am I going to be able help you?”

“I’m not certain if you’re able to help us.” Liang Zhong looked deeply towards him and gave it some thought before speaking, “If you are able to summon the thunder from Ninth Heaven just like that day on the stone bridge, then you will be of help. Otherwise, it will have been a mistake to bring you along, and you will become a completely useless burden.”

The moment the words came out, Qin Lie’s eyebrows became locked in a deep frown as he spoke bluntly, “Then I will tell you right now that you are going to be disappointed. I am unable to summon the power of thunder again. It was just an accident last time, and… you have thought too highly of me.”

When he fought against Feng Kai on the stone bridge, during a dangerous moment he had miraculously attracted lightning to fall from the sky and dealt Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong severe injuries.

Since then, he had immersed himself for a few days to see if he could cause lightning to fall once more.

He had not succeeded once ever since.

Therefore, he had categorized that particular success as a miracle.

And since it's a miracle, then naturally it could not possibly happen every time, and it wasn't something that would come just because he wanted it to.

"Oh, really?" With narrowed eyes, Liang Zhong curled his lips into a smile, but the smile seemed a little off. "Then maybe, you'll be able to surpass your limits under the threat of death."

He slapped Qin Lie's shoulders, and ignoring the fact that his face had lost all color, Liang Zhong continued to speak with a smile, "Ready yourself to face death firsthand, kid."

Chapter 80: The Leaders Of The Four Sides

The natural stone forest covered over tens of miles and was situated in between Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City.

Countless rock formations of different shapes and sizes stood inside the stone forest, and its terrain was fairly complex, making it pretty easy to hide one's trail. Spirit beasts took to this place like ducks to water, so it was harder than usual to hunt them down.

The spirit beasts that had stepped out of the Arctic Mountain Range were operating around the border of the three cities. The moment they suffer a loss when fighting against the martial practitioners and found the situation unfavorable, they would often choose this forest of stone as the place to escape to.

Over time, this natural stone forest became their most favored sanctuary.

Martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Fire Association, and Water Moon Sect were initially unfamiliar with the stone forest and thus suffered a great number of losses inside, losing quite a few people.

Gradually, they realized that the spirit beasts loved to escape into the stone forest and thus began to treat the matter with seriousness.

All four martial practitioner forces shifted their true attention to

the stone forest and explored the terrain seriously. Area after area they invaded to make preparations for the gradual extermination of the spirit beasts that had gathered inside.

As the number of martial practitioners from all four powers increased, they slowly gained the initiative.

Humans were smarter, after all, and once they had researched the terrain completely, they would make arrangements beforehand and prepare all sorts of traps and ambushes.

With these advantages, the martial practitioners from the four forces had been able to make significant progress hunting spirit beasts as of late. Almost everyday spirit beasts would be flushed out and killed, and a lot of people who had tasted blood also rushed over when they heard of news from this region.

This was because everyone knew that there were many spirit beasts inside the stone forest and that occasionally there would be new spirit beasts that would enter the fray, so they all wanted to come here to hunt down spirit beasts to obtain spirit materials and beast cores and also accumulate contribution points.

Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, Yan Qingsong, and others from Shattered Ice Manor; Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, Kang Zhi and others from Nebula Pavilion; and even Xiong Ba from Crimson Flame Association and Na Nuo from Water Moon Sect were operating inside this natural stone forest. Everyone had the same idea of reaping great rewards inside this stone forest.

Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba and Water Moon Sect's Na Nuo were both leaders of the young generation with fame no less than Yan Ziqian and Tu Ze themselves. They were all great leaders of the future.

"Sssssssss!"

A Golden Crag Beast became covered in flames, fiery sparks flying off its stone-like body as it roared in pain.

There was a young man about two meters tall wearing a martial practitioner garment bearing his arms. He had bulging muscles covering his entire body and looked as stout as a human bear. With a grin, he let out a weird chuckle and was doing his best to hunt down this Golden Crag Beast with a few martial practitioners from Crimson Flame Association in golden color martial practitioner dress.

This unsightly, inhuman-looking fellow, with an extremely huge body, was the one who had let loose those shots of fire.

He held a golden spear in his hands and continuously swallowed and spat out flames while fighting the Golden Crag Beast head on, whereas the other Crimson Flame martial practitioners had spread out to coordinate with him and attacked the beast from both sides. It was slowly losing its strength.

The young man who was like a man-bear was, of course, Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba, and at first glance, his battle against the Golden Crag Beast did not look like a battle between man and

beast.

—It looked more like two wild beasts tearing, biting, and tangling with each other.

“Savage Xiong, why don’t you give me the Golden Crag Beast’s eye? I’ll exchange it with the horn of a Dragonhorn Rhinoceros.”

A beautiful young girl dressed in a bright yellow tight suit looked leisurely in his direction with six or seven equally young and beautiful women beside her.

The girl in the bright yellow tight suit looked to be about eighteen or nineteen years old. She was tall and lanky, her breasts full and firm with a pair of long legs and an attractive face.

A lifelike rainbow-colored spirit snake was drawn on her white left arm. She even bared her left arm intentionally so it would appear as if a rainbow-colored serpent was encircling it, causing people to feel fear from the bottom of their hearts with just a glance.

“Na Nuo, do you really think I’m stupid? How can the horn of a Dragonhorn Rhinoceros compare to the Golden Eye of a Golden Crag Beast? Besides, I have no use for the horn at all, so why would I trade for it?” The moment Xiong Ba opened his mouth again, it was like the rumblings of thunder, “Last time I traded with you, I almost got beaten to death by my father! I will never ever trade any spirit materials with you again!”

“Hehe, I was just playing with you last time! I definitely won’t deceive you this time.” Na Nuo giggled non-stop, and she was laughing so hard her snake-like waist couldn’t even straighten anymore. The girls from Water Moon Sect behind her were also covering their mouths and laughing non-stop, and the more they thought about that incident, the funnier it seemed.

“Like hell I’ll believe you!” Xiong Ba humphed with a livid expression and ignored Na Nuo. He began bloodily dissecting the Golden Crag Beast with his equally rugged-looking brothers.

“How boring.” Na Nuo glanced once at the bloody scene and frowned. “The fellows from Crimson Fire Association are a bunch of beasts wearing human skin after all. I suppose Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion are still the more interesting ones. But, sigh, such a shame that that Tu Ze is a coward. Yan Ziqian has already provoked him several times, but he just endured it all the way. He really makes people worry for him.”

“Sister Na Nuo, Tu Ze is being tactful.” A girl behind her seemed to have good feelings for Tu Ze and his men; thus, she could not help but defend them. “The Ice Drake Sword Yan Ziqian is wielding was tailor made for him by Dark Asura Hall’s Master Lu, and when combined with the spirit art he’s cultivating, its power is simply astounding. Tu Ze can’t fight him, and Zhuo Qian also can’t defeat Feng Kai, so of course they’re going to avoid them for now. If they really went and risked their lives instead, then wouldn’t he be as stupid as Xiong Ba?”

“You stinkin’ brat, don’t tell me you’ve fallen for Tu Ze?” Na Nuo turned around and punched her once, teasing, “So Little Sparrow

is lusting for a man. Do you want me to make a match between the two of you?”

“What nonsense are you talking about, I’ll pinch you to death!” The girl who was called a little bird fooled around with Na Nuo with a tiny blush on her face.

Na Nuo and the girls from Water Moon Sect began to fool around inside the stone forest. Giggling and running about, they were like a group of larks painting a beautiful scenery into existence.

“Ahem, Na Nuo.”

It was at this moment Yan Ziqian came over with his men from Shattered Ice Manor. Beside him were Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong.

They all wore bright silver clothes, and everyone one of them appeared to be smart and handsome. Their appearances were far, far better than those of Crimson Flame Association’s, so the moment they came over, the girls of Water Moon Sect quickly stopped their game of pursuit and began to feign gentleness and innocence like sheltered young ladies.

“What are you calling me for?” Na Nuo stopped fooling around and smiled prettily at Yan Ziqian, saying, “Aren’t you keeping an eye on Tu Ze everyday to be ready to interrupt their good fortune at any moment? Why did you come find us instead?”

Lately, Yan Ziqian and his gang had been keeping a tight watch

on Tu Ze, and the moment they found that they were hunting spirit beasts, they would immediately join the fray and forcefully claim that they were the ones who found the spirit beasts first before robbing them of spirit materials by force.

At first, both sides had clashed with each other several times, and quite a number of people were injured from those clashes.

However, those who had been injured were mostly on Tu Ze's side. Kang Zhi and Han Feng were bloody and Zhuo Qian's arm was still somewhat unusable after it was stabbed once by Feng Kai's sword.

But the one who suffered the most was still Tu Ze. He had three wounds on his chest, and it seemed like they hadn't completely healed yet.

—They were all wounds given by Yan Ziqian.

After suffering a few losses, Tu Ze and his men had no choice but to swallow their anger and do their best to avoid conflict with Yan Ziqian and the others. Even if they were provoked, they had to grit their teeth and pretend they heard nothing.

There were a few martial practitioners from Dark Asura Hall who were taking charge in this stone forest, and it was because of them that Yan Ziqian didn't dare to act too wantonly and do everything in their power to kill Tu Ze. That was why Tu Ze and the others were still around.

But Tu Ze's condition in the stone forest was downright terrible due to the existence of Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian...

"Tu Ze?" Yan Ziqian laughed coldly. "That cowardly fellow only knows how to run and hide, giving me no chance to end him once and for all. If it weren't for the people from Dark Asura Hall, those bastards... Hmph!"

"Oh, so you were this powerful then?" Na Nuo's smile was playful. "Why don't you go play a bit with Savage Xiong then? I do still know him quite well; if you harass him, then he would definitely not run away. Look, Savage Xiong and his buddies are dissecting a Golden Crag Beast right at the front. Why don't you go and rob them?"

The girls from Water Moon Sect behind her began to giggle as well, and a few energetic ones even led with a shout, "C'mon, go fight them! If you're really so powerful, then go fight Savage Xiong! I wonder who among you is more fearsome? I, I love aggressive men, and I love watching fights the most."

A girl made a look of absolute infatuation and loudly urged them on as if she couldn't wait to see the world burn.

The moment Xiong Ba was brought up, Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong's faces shook and appeared a bit awkward.

It wasn't as if they were afraid of Xiong Ba and his gang if they had really gotten into a fight. It was just that Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba was famous for his fearlessness towards

death, and if they really did fight, Xiong Ba would go absolutely crazy and wouldn't stop until one of them was dead — he was someone who would dare to go against even Dark Asura Hall's orders.

Yan Ziqian wouldn't dare to provoke such a mad dog without a good reason, so he laughed awkwardly, "Shattered Ice Manor has no conflict with Crimson Flame Association and there is no grudge between us, so obviously we have no reason to fight each other."

Seeing that he hadn't fallen into her trap, Na Nuo disinterestedly said in a perfunctory tone, "Then what is it you came to me for?"

"We found three Rank Two spirit beasts, but we're not sure we can take them on all by ourselves, so we're inviting you girls into the group to work together. I wonder if you're interested?" Yan Ziqian told her the reason they came over.

"Three Rank Two spirit beasts?" Na Nuo's eyes brightened as she nodded. "Yes I am. But how are we going to split the loot? How many beasts do you want?"

"We'll split by whoever put in the most effort. What do you think?" Yan Ziqian asked.

"Sure." Na Nuo might have appeared casual, but her words were very sharp. "I doubt you have the guts to snatch my prey from my hands!"

“Hehe, and why would we snatch anything from a beautiful lady? We’re gifting you stuff on our own will, okay?” Yan Qingsong laughed loudly. “Follow me, I’ll bring you over right now. I personally love to share the good stuff with beautiful girls.”

After that, the girls from Water Moon Sect giggled and, under Na Nuo’s lead, followed Shattered Ice Manor’s men into the stone forest.

On the other side.

Tu Ze leaned against a stone pillar with his chest wrapped in bandages. With a heavy expression, he said, “We were the ones who found those three Rank Two spirit beasts first, but we can’t handle them the way we are. It’s fine that Yan Qingsong sees it, we’ll just let them busy themselves with the task. We’ll admit our loss this time and regain our pride in the future.”

“Sigh, if our spirit artifacts had been successfully created, what would we have to fear of Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai?” Zhuo Qian’s eyes were dark.

“There’s no point talking about this now. A loss is a loss. We can only endure this for the moment and talk about it later.” Tu Ze let out a sigh. “Let’s get through this period of time first, and when I get back, I will gather the spirit materials and request Great Master Lu’s help once more!” His eyes were red as he yelled, “I refuse to accept that my luck will continue to stay bad! When I finally get my spirit artifact, I will immediately seek out Yan Ziqian and obtain our revenge!”

The moment he said that, Zhuo Qian the others to grit their teeth, looking like they were about to eat someone alive. It looked like that had been thoroughly oppressed by Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the others.

They did not notice that, while they were swearing solemn oaths, there was a Ghost Bird flying atop their heads.

The Ghost Bird flew out of the natural stone forest and arrived at its entrance. It dropped onto Liang Zhong's shoulder, and after listening to it for a while, Liang Zhong said, "These pair of eyes have helped me find Tu Ze."

Qin Lie's expression shook atop the Profound Nether Beast, and he unconsciously touched the oilcloth wrapping the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip. He was filled with anticipation.

Chapter 81: Turned Around

“Huh, aren’t these our friends from Nebula Pavilion? What have you found these past few days?”

Yan Qingsong suddenly appeared from behind a stone pillar. Once they saw Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, they laughed and began teasing.

From the back, Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo also appeared one by one, and they were all looking in Tu Ze’s direction.

Tu Ze’s group was behind a large green brown stone, and these stones were piled up into a tall peak. There was a narrow and long stone road in the middle of it.

The three Rank Two spirit beasts were a few miles behind these stone roads. If Yan Qingsong and the crowd wanted to hunt them, there were other paths; they didn’t necessarily need to go through this stone road.

Yan Qingsong knew this, yet he still chose to walk this way. It was obvious that he did it on purpose.

Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo couldn’t help but grin a little when she saw Yan Ziqian and Tu Ze run into each other again. She had a rather interested look and even signalled the sisters behind her to stop, putting on the appearance that she was going to watch a good show.

“Qingsong, how should we continue?” Feng Kai frowned and went out of his way to ask.

Yan Qingsong purposefully pointed at the stone path behind Tu Ze with quite the natural expression. “Behind them.”

“Get out of the way!”

Wearing a cold expression, Yan Ziqian pulled the Ice Drake Sword out of its scabbard. The instant the silver white blade came out, a chilly atmosphere immediately spread out into the area.

A cold white fog flowed out of his palm, as if magically merging with the Ice Drake Sword.

Upon close examination, one would realize that inside the Ice Drake Sword’s blade there was a very faint white mark that vaguely appeared in the form of a dragon.

Wielding the Ice Drake Sword, Yan Ziqian led the way and walked straight towards Tu Ze with a cold expression.

Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong, along with the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor also walked forward, harboring malicious intentions while silently reaching for their spirit artifacts. Their eyes were filled with provocation.

This was because, for their last few encounters, they had held a complete advantage, so they all wanted to look good in front of the girls from Water Moon Sect. They couldn't wait to have another go.

"Sister Na Nuo, do you think they'll fight each other?" The gentle face of a Water Moon Sect girl emanated with excitement. "How strange. Both Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion are just like us; vassal forces under Dark Asura Hall. In fact, they even stay in the same city, why are they so hateful towards each other?"

"I don't know whether or not they'll fight each other, but I do know a little about the other matter you're asking about." Na Nuo's expression was collected as she watched the opposing men approaching each other. Her thin long brows lifted upwards, and she wore a thin smile at the corner of her lips. "In the past, there was no Nebula Pavilion in Icestone City. Both the South and North City were both Shattered Ice Manor's. Mn, the old Icestone City was owned by Shattered Ice Manor alone."

The beautiful girls of Water Moon Sect behind her were all listening intently with slightly brightened eyes.

"Back then, Shattered Ice Manor was not Dark Asura Hall's vassal, but the Black Iron ranked Profound Ice Palace's vassal. Dark Asura Hall and Profound Ice Palace have fought each other for many years, but it finally ended with Dark Asura Hall's victory. Profound Ice Palace gradually declined, and since Shattered Ice Manor was their vassal, they were naturally paid attention to during the battle against Dark Asura Hall."

Na Nuo's expression had also turned serious. "Nebula Pavilion, created by Tu Ze's father, Tu Shixiong, was still a small town outside Icestone City at the time and was a small force that could not compare even to a Limestone ranked force. And yet, his achievements were outstanding in this battle. Through sheer force, he led his subordinates into Icestone City, and combining his strength with Dark Asura Hall's, they successfully destroyed Shattered Ice Manor's resistance.

"Seeing that Profound Ice Palace has declined and that they had no way of fighting Dark Asura Hall, Shattered Ice Manor had no choice but to surrender. Because of this, Tu Shixiong had obtained great merit, and so, Nebula Pavilion also ascended to become a Limestone ranked power. Since Dark Asura Hall was also worried that Shattered Ice Manor may still have been harboring thoughts of betrayal, they also allowed Nebula Pavilion to stay in Icestone City. And together with Shattered Ice Manor, they both managed this city that should've only belonged to Shattered Ice Manor.

"During the war that year, many people from Shattered Ice Manor were killed by Tu Shixiong. In addition, Icestone City, which originally belonged solely to them, had been split in half so Nebula Pavilion could build their sect. How can Shattered Ice Manor not hate Nebula Pavilion?"

Na Nuo tirelessly made the reason clear. "Therefore, during the years after that, even though both forces belonged to Dark Asura Hall, they have waged countless battles in the shadows, and this infighting has never stopped. As the number of deaths piled up, the grudge and hatred between the two sides grew deeper and deeper. I'm afraid even Dark Asura Hall has no way of resolving it now."

“So this is how it is.” The girls came to realization.

“Well, it has nothing to do with us anyway.” Na Nuo smiled casually. “Our job is to sit here and watch the show. Let them fight each other however they want. I just love to see people fight, and the more intense the better.”

“Yeah, yeah!” The girl behind her quickly threw the grudge between Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula out of mind and cheered happily.

“Get out of the way!”

Holding the Ice Drake Sword and covered in cold white Fog, Yan Ziqian walked until he was in front of Tu Ze and had said that with a cold expression.

An icy-cold atmosphere leaked out from inside the Ice Drake Sword, and the dragon shaped mark inside the sword grew clearer and clearer, as if it were about to leap out of the sword...

Tu Ze felt pain from the wound on his chest starting to come back. He grit his teeth with a fearsome expression and breathed deeply , breath after breath, in order to calm himself down.

He suddenly closed his eyes to avoid seeing the taunting and insulting look on Yan Ziqian’s face. He yelled softly, “Let’s go.”

He led the way and left the stone path behind him.

“C’mon!” with her head lowered, Zhuo Qian pulled at Han Feng’s sleeves and forcefully pulled him away.

Han Feng’s eyes were completely red as his entire body shuddered like a cornered beast. It was as if he would explode at any moment.

If it wasn’t for Zhuo Qian insistently pulling at him and repeatedly whispering for him to calm down, it was most likely that this charming-looking Han Feng was going to attack out of sheer rage.

Kang Zhi and Chu Peng were also forcefully holding back their shame, and with a difficult expression, they lowered their heads and left with Zhuo Qian and Tu Ze.

—They had surrendered the very fruits of labor that they had found first.

“What a disappointment.”

“Is this really Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian?”

“They’re weren’t like this in the past.”

“No balls whatsoever.”

"....."

The martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor did not forget to rub salt into their wounds and provoke them further as they watched them leave with cold eyes.

"How pitiful..." The girl called Little Sparrow from Water Moon Sect found the situation a bit hard to stand as she shook her head and sighed. "Tu Ze's realm is the same as Yan Ziqian's. If both sides do not use their spirit artifacts, their true strength is actually about the same. Sigh. Tu Ze's luck is a bit poor for sure, not having a powerful spirit artifact of his own. Otherwise, he would not have suffered such humiliation."

"I heard that Tu Ze has failed four times already, whereas Zhuo Qian failed three." Na Nuo made a tiny frown. "Their fathers must have spent a great deal of effort and owe multiple favors to have gathered the spirit materials for them. They really are unlucky to fail so many times. I guess they don't have such great lives."

"Speaking of having a good life, Sister Na Nuo is still the best for succeeding on the first attempt," a girl commented in admiration.

Na Nuo raised her eyebrows and pulled out a white jade ruler from her sleeves, proudly saying, "Your sister, Na Nuo, is where the fates truly lie. Not only was this 'Formless Ruler' of mine was created successfully by Master Lu in one go, he even said that this was one of his finest creations. Sometimes... luck is also an expression of strength!"

Na Nuo lightly waved her Formless Ruler, and it conjured layers of white ruler shadows that blurred everyone's eyes.

"Yan Ziqian's Ice Drake Sword is only a Common Grade Seven spirit artifact. Yet my Formless Ruler is a Profound Grade One spirit artifact! We are on completely different levels! Common Grade spirit artifacts normally can only be used until the late stage of the Natal Opening Realm. Once a person has broken through to the Manifestation Realm, then they'll most likely have to switch to a Profound Grade spirit artifact."

Pride flowed out of her expression. "When Yan Ziqian breaks through to the Manifestation Realm, his Ice Drake Sword will no longer be usable, for it will turn into a wall that restricts his true power. On the other hand, my Formless Ruler can still be used even after I break through to the Manifestation Realm! This is what you call a true difference in power. It is also why Yan Ziqian did not dare to provoke me!"

The girls behind her all turned incredibly envious upon hearing her words. Their gazes that were watching the jade ruler also turned passionate.

"Na Nuo, we can continue our journey now." From afar, Yan Ziqian turned his head. The coldness on his face was long gone, and there was even a warm smile on his face. "If the two of us join forces, then we can definitely defeat these three Rank Two spirit beasts. We will all gain a tremendous profit."

When he was facing Na Nuo, he appeared to be polite and humble. It was partly because Na Nuo was incredibly beautiful, but the most important factor was still the fact that her true strength was astounding.

“Sure, lead the way. Speaking of which, that was really disappointing. The two of you actually didn’t fight each other.” Na Nuo seemed to be feeling extra bored by the results.

“That’s because Tu Ze has no balls.”

Yan Ziqian chuckled and signalled Yan Qingsong to lead the way. On the other hand, he and Feng Kai stayed in the back and actively mingled with the girls from Water Moon Sect. With cheer and laughter, they departed to the deeper section of the stone forest.

……

When Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the others gave away the stone path, they had gone to the opposite side. The crowd wore dark expressions and no one said a thing.

They had been quiet for the longest time.

“Woosh Woosh!”

An evil black cloud flew past their heads and floated towards the area they previously departed from.

They paid it no attention.

An hour later, Gao Yu had suddenly appeared. The Ogre-faced Ring on his hands was shining with a dark light, and a powerful mind wave emanated from it.

Gao Yu's face was dark, and his eyebrows were locked deeply together. Sensing the fluctuations from the Ogre-faced Ring while paying attention to the direction, he began heading towards the stone path Yan Ziqian and Na Nuo had walked through.

He saw Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, but chose to ignore them and did not say a word.

"Gao Yu!"

Kang Zhi immediately lifted his head and called out after hearing the noise.

Zhuo Qian broke out of their depression and saw Gao Yu heading towards the stone path from before. They all frowned.

They were completely unfamiliar with Gao Yu, and because they heard that Gao Yu had tortured and killed a girl, Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had even thought of him as an outcast and rejected him in their minds.

Gao Yu was originally an extreme loner in Nebula Pavilion, and other than Qin Lie, he had no contact with any people of his age.

Moreover Gao Yu was an extremely vindictive person, and anyone who talked behind his back would be beaten until they were severely injured — if it weren't for Ye Yangqiu protecting him, some of his more extreme methods would've been punished by the Discipline Hall long ago.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had no good will towards Gao Yu, but Gao Yu was a part of Nebula Pavilion. Seeing that he he might run into Yan Ziqian and the others if he continued in that direction, Tu Ze quickly informed him, "Gao Yu, don't go that way. Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong are all there. If you go there alone, you might be in trouble!"

Gao Yu's footsteps halted as he turned around and caught a glimpse of Tu Ze's eyes. His already dark face suddenly turned evil and fearsome to the extreme. "Yan Qingsong is also there?"

Back at Celestial Wolf Mountain, Yan Qingsong had lobbed off the head of his younger clansman, and since then, Gao Yu had marked Yan Qingsong as the one person he needed to kill regardless of the consequences. The moment he heard that Yan Qingsong was also around, his old memories began to resurface once more, and this caused Gao Yu's dark side to rise to its absolute peak.

Gao Yu's gaze made even Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian feel chills. "Yeah, Yan Qingsong is around. Both Feng Kai, Ya Ziqian, and a few bastards from Shattered Ice Manor were all in one group," Tu Ze

answered.

"Noted." Gao Yu nodded his head. Then, he no longer bothered with Tu Ze and the rest. With a dark face, moving even quicker than he was before, he headed in the direction of the stone path.

"This fellow is crazy, right? We already told him that Shattered Ice Manor is right there, yet he's still going there to die?" Kang Zhi immediately yelled out.

"He's absolutely sick!" Chu Peng too wore a dark expression. "Who does he think he is? He's only at the ninth level of Refinement, what's he going to do there? Court death?"

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's expressions were also ugly; both were angered by Gao Yu's actions and thought that there was something wrong with his head.

"What do we do?" Zhuo Qian stomped her feet, and her beautiful face was riddled with frustration. "He'll definitely die if he heads in that direction. Yan Ziqian will never let him go. This guy is such a mad dog; how does Qin Lie know him?"

"He knows Qin Lie?" Tu Ze looked surprised.

During this time, he was either cultivating in seclusion or begging Great Master Lu from Dark Asura Hall to forge an artifact, so he really wasn't sure about what was going on inside the pavilion.

“Mn, Qin Lie is his only friend inside the pavilion, and the two of them often sparred each other inside the Combat Room. I seriously do not understand why such a smart person like Qin Lie would be friends with such a twisted person. When I get back, I’m going to give him a good lecture!” Zhuo Qian angrily said.

“Regardless, Gao Yu is still a part of Nebula Pavilion, and he’s also Qin Lie’s friend. We can’t do anything about his head, but we cannot leave him to die.” With a dark face, Tu Ze grit his teeth and said, “Let’s go! We’ll follow him!”

“Big brother Tu? You?” Kang Zhi was shocked.

They were just humiliated by Yan Ziqian and the others, and as of late, they had been avoiding confrontation with the other party as much as they could. When facing Yan Ziqian, they were pretty much staying away from them at all cost, yet now Tu Ze was going to ask for trouble just for Gao Yu’s sake?

Kang Zhi could neither figure it out nor understand it.

But there was one thing he was sure of, and that was if Tu Ze went back and met Yan Ziqian again, he would not gain anything and instead only humiliate himself further.

They would also suffer losses along with Tu Ze, and perhaps they might even be injured once more.

“The worst that’ll happen if we go back is are a bit more losses. As long as we keep up our guard a little, it should not be a big problem. At worst I’ll just add another wound to my chest…” The corner of Tu Ze’s lips were bitter. “But if we do not go back, then Gao Yu will definitely die! He is part of Nebula Pavilion, and my name is Tu! Those surnamed Tu will never allow anyone to murder a person from Nebula Pavilion and ignore it!”

Tu Ze turned back without any hesitation.

Zhuo Qian, Kang Zhi, and the others’ eyes were all red, and without a word they clenched their fists and followed him closely.

They knew it wouldn’t end well for them to go back. They knew they were going to lose. They knew they were going to be humiliated…

But regardless, they all turned around!

……

Chapter 82: Harsh Battle

At the center of the seven tall stone pillars, the stone ground was littered with holes, appearing in the form of a sunken valley.

Many odd-shaped stones riddled the surroundings, and there were the feces and hair of spirit beasts lying on the ground. It was obvious that there were spirit beasts operating in this area.

The sun hung high, and under the bright sunlight, a few of the valley's stone pillars cast shadows on the floor. Among them, there were three shadowy areas where spirit beasts were squatting underneath to rest while avoiding the sunlight.

They included a Silver Flame Spider, a Golden Haired Ape, and a Poison Scale Scorpion. They were all Rank Two spirit beasts, and their strength could compare to a martial practitioner in the Natal Opening Realm.

All three spirit beasts were several meters tall, and among them, the Poison Scale Scorpion's entire body was covered in a glittering poisonous green. A smell of acidic-poison surrounded its body.

The Silver Flame Spider laid on top of a web, seemingly asleep. The Golden Haired Ape had a full body of golden hair, just over two meters tall and brutal-looking golden eyes.

At a juncture so small that it could only fit two people side by side, Yan Qingsong's actions were careful as he poked his head into the open.

He explained in a soft voice to Na Nuo behind him, “A Silver Flame Spider, Golden Haired Ape and Poison Scale Scorpion are all here. They dislike sunlight and are all resting under the shade at the moment. Come and take a look.” He quietly slanted his body so that Na Nuo could come up too.

Na Nuo went up, and after her bright eyes swept across the area once, she giggled softly, “Not bad, your information is very accurate. With our abilities, we can totally take all three of these Rank Two beasts.”

“As for how are we going to split the loot, that will depend on who puts in the most effort,” Yan Ziqian said from behind.

Na Nuo nodded once, then pulled out a white jade ruler and walked straight out into the open towards the the Silver Flame Spider. “I’ll take care of the spider by myself. You and my sisters shall fight the remaining two beasts. That will be our arrangement.”

While Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai were surprised, Na Nuo waved the Formless Ruler in her hands once, and almost instantly, the entire small valley became filled with a heavy power and the skies filled with countless ruler shadows.

All three beasts immediately noticed the danger and immediately got up from their shade. They were all roaring and growling before angrily rushing towards the group of people.

With a sweet giggle, Na Nuo's lithe figure fell like the wind right in front of the Silver Flame Spider.

"Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh!"

Many balls of silver flame floated from the spider's body like bubbles.

Not only were those silver-colored flames not hot at all, they were so abnormally cold that even a strange noise resounded as if the air itself was being frozen.

"Stupid spider, do you really think you can hurt me with that?"

Na Nuo's expression was relaxed as she suddenly threw out her Formless Ruler; the sky of ruler shadows carried within themselves a tremendous pressure. They then fell onto the Silver Flame Spider like a heavy downpour, striking it until it howled shrilly.

"That's indeed worthy of a Profound Grade spirit artifact; most impressive," said Yan Qingsong with admiration after taking a glance from in the back.

"Feng Kai, you and Qingsong will take care of the Poison Scale Scorpion. I'll help our friends from Water Moon Sect deal with the Golden Haired Ape!" Yan Ziqian yelled once and charged towards the Golden Haired Ape with the girls from Water Moon Sect.

Feng Kai and Yan Ziqian were both at the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm, so they wouldn't have too much of a disadvantage when fighting against a Rank Two spirit beast. Add in a few Refinement Realm companions to the mix, bombarding the beasts with spirit artifacts and techniques, wouldn't make it too hard to kill a Rank Two spirit beast.

Everyone had been operating around this natural stone forest for a while now, so they were getting more and more experienced in fighting spirit beasts. Once the operation had begun, the martial practitioner with the highest realm would fight at the front to attract the majority of the firepower. Those with slightly weaker realms would spread out and attack from both wings using spirit artifacts, techniques, arrows, and spears.

As a result, since the spirit beast was being attacked from all sides – it could defend the front but not the back, defend the left side but not the right – they would normally be injured all over and slowly exhausted until they were worn down to death.

This time, there were no exceptions as well.

Under the leadership of the young leaders, Na Nuo, Feng Kai, and Yan Ziqian, and the combined strength of more than twenty juniors, it didn't take them too much time before they physically blasted the three Rank Two spirit beasts until they were hurt all over. In the end the beasts collapsed to the ground.

"I took down the Silver Flame Spider on my own, so that one's ours for sure. You showed some effort on the Golden Haired Ape as well, so we'll just take its skin and the core and give you the rest.

The Poison Scale Scorpion is yours entirely. Any questions?”

Na Nuo gave her opinion with a face full of smiles beside the three bloody spirit beasts.

Out of all three beasts, the Silver Flame Spider had the highest value and the Golden Haired Ape followed right after. The Poison Scale Scorpion was the lousiest of them...

Since she had claimed the Silver Flame Spider under her own name and demanded the Golden Haired Ape’s fur and core, it could be said that she had reaped the benefits entirely. Smiling at Yan Ziqian, her smile suddenly turned gentle as she said in a coy tone, “You are the rich men from Shattered Ice Manor, surely you wouldn’t haggle with us poor ladies, would you?”

Yan Ziqian and his group’s faces shook a little before they all helplessly nodded their heads, accepting this way of splitting the loot.

“Then we are in agreement!” Na Nuo waved a hand. “We’ll leave it to you guys to dissect the bodies, and once the spirit materials have been arranged, all you need to do is to pass us the materials that belong to us.”

She turned her head and smiled proudly at her sisters in the back. The girls from Water Moon Sect also responded with smiling giggles.

“I knew that we wouldn’t be walking off with much from the moment we came to you. Hehe, thankfully we weren’t planning on that.” Yan Qingsong wiped the spirit beasts’ blood off his body and coolly inquired, “Once we’ve finished splitting the spirit materials, why don’t we all drink a bit and celebrate later? Surely you won’t reject our invitation?”

The moment he said that, Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the rest of the martial practitioners from Shattered Ice Manor all looked towards the girls of Water Moon Sect in expectation.

—This was their real goal.

“No problem. I’m sure that my sisters would like to know such pleasing-looking fellows too,” Na Nuo promised without hesitation.

The men’s eyes obviously brightened, and their expressions were also excited.

“Alright boys, let’s get the job done and we’ll drink some wine with the sisters and talk about life or something,” Yan Qingsong said in a pleased tone.

The Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners immediately busied themselves in high spirits, and the little loss they suffered on the spirit materials had been forgotten long ago.

They did not notice that, atop their heads, a black cloud had

floated over without notice...

There was not a cloud to be found under the hot sun, so when a black cloud had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, it appeared both strange and bizarre.

Columns of grayish-brown smoke, invisible to the normal human eye, began to float out of the bodies of the three spirit beasts. As if attracted by the black clouds, they began to slowly float, and without anyone noticing, slipped into the black cloud.

The black cloud was originally just as big as a disc. After a temporary stay, it had obviously grown larger.

However, the crowd from Shattered Ice Manor was filled with thoughts of getting to know the girls from Water Moon Sect better and thus did not pay attention to the sky nor notice anything amiss.

After a while, no more grayish-brown smoke was emitted the three spirit beasts, and the black cloud had also grown a lot larger.

At this moment, Gao Yu, who had been following the black cloud all this time, had finally arrived to this area.

The moment he appeared, both Shattered Ice Manor and Water Moon Sect's crowds immediately noticed and looked towards him.

"Gao Yu, hehe, what a coincidence." Yan Qingsong grinned with

slightly chilly eyes. “Didn’t you say you were going to kill me back at Celestial Wolf Mountain? I’ve been waiting for you to do that for so long, yet you never came. You disappoint me.”

“Gao Family’s Gao Yu.” Feng Kai’s face darkened. “The responsibility of my brother’s lost arm at Celestial Wolf Mountain falls on you as well!”

“Yan Qingsong!” Gao Yu’s handsome face was dark, and his eyes flashed with a dark and evil light. He was like a poisonous snake that gave people an incredibly uncomfortable and dangerous feeling.

Still, his main objective today wasn’t Yan Qingsong. He immediately looked towards the black cloud in the sky upon arrival.

After Gao Yu had arrived, that black cloud too appeared to be alerted and quietly floated away.

“I have no time for you today. The next time we meet, I will kill you!” The moment he saw the black cloud leaving, Gao Yu’s face immediately turned urgent and was about to hastily follow it.

“Hehe, do you really think that I will give you a ‘next time’?” Yan Qingsong frowned. “I heard that you’ve broken through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm and share the same realm as me now. I have always been such a coward and I never overestimate myself. I won’t wait until you grow stronger where you’ll become a real threat to me.”

After a pause, Yan Qingsong suddenly leaped towards Gao Yu. “So, in order to prevent you from becoming a threat to me in the future, I believe I will feel much assured if I kill you first today!”

Yan Qingsong had always been famous in Shattered Ice Manor for his schemes and ruthlessness. He was a very careful man who would not leave too many chances for his enemies.

From the moment Gao Yu declared that he was going to kill him, he had been paying him attention from the dark. The moment he knew Gao Yu entered Nebula Pavilion and broke through to the ninth level of the Refinement Realm, he immediately felt pressured and saw Gao Yu as a target that he needed to get rid of sooner rather than later. Since Gao Yu had walked right into his lap, why would he ever let him leave so easily?

In almost an instant, Yan Qingsong had rushed over right in front of Gao Yu, blocking his way and seizing the initiative.

“You’re courting death!” Gao Yu was worried about that black cloud, and the moment he saw Yan Qingsong interfering, he immediately felt murderous and fought him.

“God dammit, they’re actually fighting! This crazy Gao Yu, didn’t he see that they have so many men?”

Just as Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and their group hurriedly rushed over into the valley, they immediately saw Gao Yu and Yan Qingsong fighting each other. Fatty Kang Zhi immediately stomped his feet

and yelled as he glared daggers at Gao Yu.

“Brother Tu, look, aren’t these the three spirit beasts that we discovered?” coldly asked Chu Peng as he looked at the bodies of the spirit beasts on the floor.

“And here I was wondering why you guys suddenly left. I see now that you were planning to sneak in while we were weak. Tu Ze, you sure scheme well alright!” After a brief shock, as if he had just suddenly reacted, Yan Ziqian suddenly said with a cold voice and cold eyes, “Do you really think that we would have expended so much spirit energy on the spirit beasts that you would be able to gain the upper hand from that?”

The moment he finished, he rushed over with his Ice Drake Sword, yelling, “These people are here to take advantage of us!”

Both Feng Kai and the people of Shattered Ice Manor did not think that Tu Ze and the others were there to protect Gao Yu. They assumed that they were in cahoots in the first place, and they had also chosen this exact moment after they had killed the spirit beasts to appear. So obviously they were trying to snatch their loot after their strength had been expended.

Almost instantly, both sides had reignited their war and became involved in an intense melee.

Both sides had fought against each other several times and were familiar enough to know each other’s opponents, so they immediately found their targets and began fighting.

Yan Ziquan versus Tu Ze and Feng Kai versus Zhuo Qian. Originally, Kang Zhi was going to fight Yan Qingsong, but because Gao Yu had locked down Yan Qingsong like a madman, he had moved on to a different opponent. Everyone else had their own opponents, and they began killing each other inside the valley.

"Sister Na Nuo, this..."

The girls of Water Moon Sect still hadn't digested the situation. All of a sudden, the people from Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion were fighting each other, and they found the valley a mess.

"What does it have to do with us?" Na Nuo herself was stunned for a second, but she immediately broke into a smile. "All we need to do is to watch from the sidelines!"

Once they heard her words, the girls from Water Moon Sect relaxed. Giggling, they began to chatter excitedly while pointing at the fighters and making all sorts of comments.

"Sigh, the longblade in Tu Ze's hands still has holes from the Ice Drake Sword from the previous few battles. How is he going to fight?"

"From the looks of it, Tu Ze is still going to be at a disadvantage. Come on, that Yan Ziqian is totally relying on the advantage of his spirit artifact."

“Feng Kai and Zhuo Qian’s spirit artifacts are about the same rank, but Feng Kai is older and he was in the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm for a long time. Zhuo Qian has only broken through to the Natal Opening Realm, and she’s also not too used to the fighting style of the Natal Opening Realm. She won’t have any advantage against Feng Kai at all. Yeah, it’ll probably be just like before where she gets pummeled by Feng Kai. That’s the reality of it. The two of them have quite the gap between them after all.”

“Look, as I thought, both Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian are injured!”

“Oh! Look at that Gao Yu fellow, he seems pretty fierce! As for that Yan Qingsong… his bark is loud alright, but it doesn’t look like he has the advantage, does he?”

“Gao Yu, I’ve heard about this person. There was a rumor that he’s a little… psychotic. He once tortured and killed a girl.”

“What, really? How disgusting!”

“Mn, he sure doesn’t look like a good guy no matter how you look at him. If things don’t look good for Yan Qingsong, then maybe I’ll help him myself! Nothing suits that psychotic fellow better than death itself!”

Just like Na Nuo, the girls from Water Moon Sect stayed out of the way while watching and heatedly discussing the fight.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian were not Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai's match during the previous battle, and this time, they also didn't have the upper hand.

The crimson longblade in Tu Ze's hands had many holes in it, so during the clash against the Ice Drake Sword, he was at a complete disadvantage.

At this moment, three more bloody wounds had appeared on Tu Ze's chest. After the chill had seeped into the blood stain, the blood had even turned into bloody crystals. From the outside, his blood appeared very fresh, but only Tu Ze knew that, inside the wound, the chill was seeping into his chest bit by bit, causing him to feel cramped all over and gradually slow down.

"If my spirit artifact was created successfully, then how would I possibly suffer such a loss? Do the heavens mean to suppress me as well so I won't ever compare to this bastard Yan Ziqian?!"

With a hideous expression and bloody red eyes, Tu Ze clashed against Yan Ziqian, but his heart screamed in defiance on the inside.

"You damnable traitor, if Great Master Lu hadn't broken my Dragon Bone Whip again, I would have whipped your face bloody a long time ago!" Gritting her teeth, Zhuo Qian's beautiful face yelled furiously.

There were two new tight wounds on top of her snow white arm. The wound was shocking to the eye, and even her bones could be

vaguely seen.

“Swoosh Swoosh!”

It was at this moment that the wind-like, sweeping sound of spirit beasts had come from afar, and very soon, a pair of gloomy Profound Nether Beasts abruptly appeared.

“We’re here.” Liang Zhong frowned and took a glance towards the valley. Then he said in surprise, “They’re actually infighting, and pretty intense too.”

“Brother Tu! Sister Qian!”

The moment the Profound Nether Beast stopped, Qin Lie also clearly saw the scenery inside the valley. His eyes instantly turned red, like a beast that had been enraged and became stricken suddenly with hysteria.

His handsome face became instantly filled with a color of irritation and madness. Even his body became afflicted with an odd shuddering.

—He recklessly rushed forth.

Chapter 83: Receiving The Blade!

Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong coldly watched the battle inside the valley from atop the Profound Nether Beast.

Tu Ze's chest was covered in fresh blood that looked like many red drills. After the blood drops had frozen, it actually emanated a strange and demonic kind of beauty, and when complemented with Tu Ze's slightly pale face, it appeared stranger and stranger.

A bright silvery line of ice wiggled inside the Ice Drake Sword in Yan Ziqian's hands, and a weak dragonic aura actually emanated from it.

While the Ice Drake Sword slashed across the air, there were many shoots of silver rays emanating from it that were cold and gleaming. Many of these rays of light were aimed at Tu Ze's neck and heart. Of course, if they hit these vital spots, then Tu Ze most likely would not be able to survive.

It was obvious that Yan Ziqian did not feel the slightest bit of mercy when he acted against Tu Ze. He was planning to kill Tu Ze on the spot!

Feng Kai was also the same; his entire posture bespoke that he was going to murder Zhuo Qian with each swing of his blade aiming to take her life!

On top of the Profound Nether Beast, the white dressed Xie Jingxuan frowned slightly as a trace of coldness leaked out of her

pair of pure and translucent eyes. “Could it be that the infighting between our subordinate forces have all escalated to this state?”

She knew a little about what was going on inside Dark Asura Hall.

To preserve the energy of their subordinate forces, Dark Asura Hall allowed the vassal forces to compete with each other and tolerated physical conflict between them.

Only through conflict could a person get used to a cruel environment, and only then there would be more outstanding martial practitioners to provide Dark Asura Hall with combat capable fresh blood.

However, the infighting between vassal forces had reached a point where the only way to resolve the conflict was for one side to die out. Is this really what Dark Asura Hall wishes to see?

“Miss, not all battles between vassal forces are this fierce. Most of the vassal forces are still at a controllable state, and they would not engage in life-or-death battles.” Liang Zhong could see that she was unhappy and hurriedly explained, “Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion are a bit special…”

He explained to her the reason.

Xie Jingxuan’s eyes bespoke of surprise, “If what you say is true, then the great animosity between Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula

Pavilion has always existed. Then, why didn't the hall send anyone to resolve it?"

Liang Zhong gave a bitter laugh, "... Shattered Ice Manor is closer to the First Hall Master, whereas Tu Mo's father, Tu Shixiong, is a commander under the Second Hall Master. As you know, the relationship between First Hall Master and Second Hall Master... isn't too friendly."

"I see." Xie Jingxuan looked surprised, then let out a quiet sigh. "Sigh, so conflict does exist no matter where you go."

"Miss, should we interfere?" asked Liang Zhong, asking for instructions while watching the battle..

"Let's take a look first."

"Understood."

"Brother Tu! Sister Qian!"

Irritation and madness filled Qin Lie's face. Blue lightning entwined both his arms as he rushed over with a roar while holding the wooden sculpture in his hand.

"Qin Lie!"

"Qin Lie's here!"

“Why are you here kid?”

“Everyone in the battle was slightly shocked the moment they saw him appear so suddenly, and they all had a different expression of their own.

Yan Ziqian, who had fully gained the upper hand had his eyebrows unconsciously locked together and his gaze turned.

He remembered it clearly. Two years ago in the Arctic Mountain Range, Qin Lie had summoned thunder from the sky and forced him into a most humiliating situation, to the point that he had no choice but to take shelter for a moment.

Feng Kai and Yan Qingsong’s faces too shuddered with an ugly expression.

A few months ago, on top of the stone bridge between Commerce Street and South City, the thick bolt of lightning had struck down from the sky and seriously wounded them. It took them half a month before they finally recovered...

Their memories about Qin Lie were as good as yesterday’s, and just the same, they hated him down to the very bones!

On the other hand, Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the others appeared roused. Their fighting spirit seemed to have climbed yet another level. It was as if Qin Lie’s arrival had allowed them to see a chance

at hope.

"Qin Lie! Go and help Zhuo Qian take down Feng Kai! I can still, handle this!" Tu Ze yelled.

"Don't listen to him, go help Tu Ze! He's almost at his limits!" Zhuo Qian, who had been dodging all this time suddenly yelled loudly.

"Pfft!"

While she was speaking, Feng Kai's sword beam had added yet another wound to her arm. Blood spilled out of it.

The sight caused Qin Lie to completely lose his momentary hesitation as he rushed over with grit teeth. "Feng Kai! I'll skin you alive!"

The electricity in the wooden sculpture suddenly brightened. The blazing electricity sparked and intertwined with each other; the faint blue electric lights were like swimming snakes, and they were even accompanied by thunderous sounds of explosions.

Every hair on the head of Qin Shan's sculpture was shooting out bolts of electricity!

They all rushed towards Feng Kai!

The moment Feng Kai, who had forced Zhuo Qian into a tight spot, saw bolts of electricity shooting towards him, his expression abruptly changed. He had no choice but to cope with it, causing the pressure on Zhuo Qian to drop immensely.

“Eh, who is that stupid looking kid who suddenly charged over? I don’t think I’ve ever heard of such a person in Nebula Pavilion?”

“Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and Yan Qingsong… All three of them seemed to be somewhat afraid of him. What is going on?”

“Sister Na Nuo, do you know of this Qin Lie fellow?”

The girls from Water Moon Sect focused on the newly arrived Qin Lie when they saw the situation changed. They could not help but discuss among themselves in an attempt to understand Qin Lie’s background.

“I don’t know him.” Na Nuo leaned against a stone pillar with the usual expression and shook her head. “He looks like he’s from Nebula Pavilion. But I really haven’t heard anything about him, so he probably isn’t anyone important. Otherwise I would’ve heard something.”

“Mn, if you look at his cultivation, he’s only at the Refinement Realm, so no wonder Sister Na Nuo didn’t know him.”

“That’s right, how can a fellow of the Refinement Realm possibly enter Sister Na Nuo’s eyes?”

“……”

The group of girls chat kept chattering.

At this moment, Na Nuo’s gaze had fallen onto Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong on the Profound Nether Beasts not far away.

She examined Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong from head to toe and felt shaken on the inside. Her eyes too leaked a trace of surprise as it seemed she noticed that they were far from ordinary.

She quickly retracted her gaze and no longer spoke, but a trace of seriousness had added itself onto her expression, and she did not continue to laugh and comment about the battle.

“The last time you were saved only because lightning had struck down from the sky. You won’t be this lucky this time!” Feng Kai relaxed a little when he lifted his head and saw the sun shining from above.

Then, light bloomed greatly from his silver sword, and his attacks were as tight as fine rain, landing endlessly around Qin Lie and Zhuo Qian.

In Qin Lie and Zhuo Qian’s eyes, it was as if there was silver drizzle pouring down beside them, and every one of these strands of rain were as sharp as a blade. The slightest bit of carelessness would result in terrible wounds.

Luckily, the wooden sculpture in Qin Lie's hand had formed a large area of electricity.

The intertwining electricity formed a thick and tight barrier, and the moment a sword beam got in, it was immediately destroyed by a lightning strike.

It was due to this factor that he and Zhuo Qian had not fallen into a disadvantageous position and looked like they were fighting equally against Feng Kai.

But Tu Ze was not that lucky...

"Spurt!"

The blade of the Ice Drake Sword had taken off a piece of flesh from his left shoulder. If he hadn't dodged it in time, it would have fallen onto his neck!

And if that was the case, the artery on his neck would've been slashed open, and Tu Ze too would die a brutal death on the spot.

While Tu Ze was frightened to the core, a huge hole on the crimson longblade was cut once again by the Ice Drake Sword.

"Crack!"

The overwhelmed longblade had finally broken into two, and there was no longer any trace of spirit energy fluctuation to be found.

“Even your spirit artifact has been destroyed. Just how are you going to fight me?” Yan Ziqian’s expression was dark and cold, “The longblade may not be too suitable for you, but at least it was still usable. But what about now?”

While he was speaking, his eyes began to roll about the surroundings to see if there was anyone from Dark Asura Hall.

He did not see anyone from Dark Asura Hall inside the stone forest. Instead, he found Xie Jingxuan, and his eyes obviously lit up for an instant due to surprise at her beauty. But it was only for an instant. He came to his senses, and eyes brimming with murderous intent, he spoke in a low tone, “There is no one from Dark Asura Hall here. Therefore, you will die here today, Tu Ze…”

“I’m right here. Come at me!” Tu Ze’s heart was already filled with the intention to die as he growled and prepared himself to fight like a cornered beast.

“Qin Lie, go and help Tu Ze quickly! He can’t take it anymore!” Zhuo Qian heard their words, and her body shuddered once as her eyes immediately teared up. She screamed out as if she had gone mad, and her voice carried a weeping tone, “Tu Ze, don’t be stupid! You better f*cking stay alive, don’t you dare throw your life away!”

“Sister Na Nuo, this isn’t right! Th-they’re really going to kill

them!”

“They have gone completely mad! This is a real fight to the death, not an argument and not a normal conflict!”

“Dark Asura Hall had strictly prohibited this!”

“What do we do? Sister Na Nuo, what do you say we should do?”

Originally, the girls from Water Moon Sect were all smiling on the sidelines and watching a good show. But now their faces had paled, and one by one, they screamed in panic.

At this moment, Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the people from Nebula Pavilion were completely covered in blood. In addition, Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai had displayed a clear intention of murder!

This fight was now completely different from what they had initially imagined, and it had completely exceeded their imaginations!

“Stop screaming! All of you, stop screaming and do not interfere! Calm down, all of you, and do not make a move!” Na Nuo’s usual smile was gone, and her expression was completely serious as she shouted sternly at her companions to stay where they were and forbade them from interfering.

She knew very well that this was not the time for them to fiddle about, and once they triggered an unnecessary misunderstanding,

then even they might be dragged into the fray.

“Big Brother Tu! Don’t lose hope! You mustn’t throw your life away, it is not worth it!”

“Big brother Tu! Endure it, just endure for now; you’re the one who said these words! The next time, when you’ve gotten your spirit artifact the next time, you will definitely be able to exact your revenge!”

“Don’t be hasty!”

Kang Zhi, Chu Peng, Han Feng, and the rest all roared as every one of them struggled like a madman, not even caring for the new wounds on their body as they desperately fought their way towards Tu Ze’s direction.

“Spirit artifact? Spirit artifact! The spirit artifacts that I’ve brought with me!”

Qin Lie, who had blood rushing up his head and was ready to charge towards Tu Ze to fight with his life, suddenly came to his senses and immediately recalled the main reason he had come here in the first place.

—He was here to deliver the spirit artifacts to Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian.

Abruptly, he forced himself to calm down and looked towards

Liang Zhong, and with the loudest voice he could muster, he roared, “Uncle Zhong, please throw over the items wrapped inside the oilcloth! Please!”

The distance between him and Liang Zhong was only less than a hundred meters, but Tu Ze’s situation was so critical that he might be killed in the next second.

He had no time to rush back and forth to grab the items.

But he knew that, as long as Liang Zhong was willing, a hundred meters of distance was not a problem at all!

That was why he begged with all his heart!

“What do you think, miss?” Liang Zhong looked baffled. To this day, he did not know what was wrapped inside the oilcloth, so he did not understand Qin Lie’s impatience.

“Give it to him,” Xie Jingxuan said indifferently.

She too did not know what was wrapped inside the oilcloth, and she was equally curious as to why, at this critical juncture, when Tu Ze was about to be killed, Qin Lie still remembered the items inside the oilcloth.

What could they be?

She wanted to see.

Therefore, Liang Zhong obeyed.

Liang Zhong extended his hands and grabbed the oilcloth, and with a casual toss, the cloth became wrapped inside a layer of blue light and crossed the hundred meters of distance in just two seconds. It flew like the wind before landing steadily on top of Qin Lie head.

Right into his hands.

When he tore open the oilcloth, two fine-looking spirit artifacts were abruptly exposed. It was a longblade and the Dragon Bone Whip; they were exactly the “defective products” he had asked for from Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian.

“Sister Qian, take this Dragon Bone Whip. I’ll bring this blade to Big Brother Tu!”

Qin Lie pulled out the Dragon Bone Whip and took the opportunity to wrap the whip around her snake-like waist when she dodged backwards abruptly. Then, he carried the longblade and charged at top speed.

“Qin Lie, it’s no use. That blade is defective! It’s not even a spirit artifact and can’t even compare to that broken blade!” Zhuo Qian shouted.

However, that was all she could shout before she was immediately pressured by Feng Kai to the point of speechlessness – after Qin Lie left, the pressure on her had increased tremendously, and she fell into a completely disadvantageous position.

“Big Brother Tu! I’m giving you a new blade!”

Qin Lie rushed forth and threw the longblade from far, far away at Tu Ze, who was covered in blood droplets.

Those blood droplets were fresh blood frozen in ice, crystalline and demonically strange, and they were but the cruelest representation of his horrific injuries!

“This is the blade Great Master Lu created for you?” when Yan Ziqian saw the longblade flew over, he actually did not go on the offensive to stop Tu Ze from receiving the blade. In fact, he even slowed down his attacks and allowed Tu Ze to grab it. His cold face was full with ridicule. “Only a failed spirit artifact can properly complement your current situation. Die along with that defective weapon of yours.”

The bladeless Tu Ze, with the thought that it’s better to have a weapon in hand than nothing at all, extended his hand and received the blade.

The moment the longblade entered his hands, the feeling that his blood had connected with it suddenly leaped into his heart!

It was as if the blade had become a part of his body, the extension of his arm, a part of his four limbs!

It was the impossible feeling of an artifact, the palm, the arm, and the flesh and blood itself melding together in perfect harmony!

Throughout his life, Tu Ze had played with tens of spirit artifacts of different grades, but never once had he experienced such a sublime feeling!

Under the spell of surprise, he activated the Nebula Art and injected it into the longblade.

The very next moment, Tu Ze's body abruptly shuddered greatly, and a most breathtaking light exploded out of his eyes!

Chapter 84: The Heavens Haven't Forsaken Me!

Very solemn expressions emerged on the pretty faces of Na Nuo and the girls from Water Moon Sect, a few of them unable to bear looking at Tu Ze.

Tu Ze, who was fatigued and whose body had been covered in wounds, seemed unable to continue on any longer. In their eyes, Tu Ze was going to end up just like his fractured longblade, broken into two by Yan Ziqian.

Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong, the two who were sitting atop the Profound Nether Beast, were also looking towards Tu Ze and at the longblade in his hand from afar…

At this moment, Kang Zhi, Han Feng, Chu Peng, and the rest, regardless of how many bone-showing deep wounds they had, all desperately moved to Tu Ze's side.

They hoped to restrain Tu Ze and advise him not to act stupid, to not risk his life against Yan Ziqian.

As for Zhuo Qian, she had been forced into a corner by Feng Kai's attacks, unable to even find time to shout.

"Don't die! Please don't die!"

She could only think in her heart, crying over and over again as she hoped Tu Ze would calm down and not charge in recklessly.

At this time, a breathtaking glint appeared in the eyes of Tu Ze, who had borrowed a new blade from Qin Lie!

One fragmentary little star of light after another magically emerged from the illuminated surface of the longblade. A glow flickered within each star of light, following some kind of pattern as it revolved like a nebula within the vastness of a galaxy. It gave off a feeling of an extremely marvelous, mind-shocking, soul-moving beauty.

As Tu Ze wielded the longblade his body constantly tremored. Suddenly, hot tears filled his eyes as he roared towards the sky, “The heavens haven’t forsaken me! The heavens haven’t forsaken me!”

Everyone’s gazes and attention were all on Tu Ze’s body. As they watched him lose control of his emotions, they had no clue what had happened.

However, it was just for a moment. Then, everyone’s became startled as shock and fear emerged in their eyes.

A awe-inspiring aura emanated off of Tu Ze’s body as the longblade in his hand suddenly became blindingly bright!

A mysterious mass of nebula light flew up from the blade of the

longblade. Like a fallen galaxy, tiny starlights flickered and constantly revolved within the mass of nebula light. From within, surging, tempestuous spirit energy fluctuations burst out.

“Shh Shh Shh!”

The crystals of blood which encrusted Tu Ze’s entire body were instantly all washed away by an ice cold power. The beads of blood turned into a river of blood, trickling down Tu Ze’s body like fine streams.

At this moment, Tu Ze’s appearance was extremely terrifying, and his aura had reached its limit!

“The heavens haven’t forsaken me!”

Tu Ze raised his blade and cut at Yan Ziqian.

As the blade moved, the mysterious mass of nebula light turned into a brilliant ball of light. Carrying the shocking strength of a landslide, it began to spin and roll towards Yan Ziqian like a huge boulder.

Atop Yan Ziqian’s sinister face, a trace of fear appeared for the first time. He had no clue what had just happened with Tu Ze’s body, but as of right now, the feeling Tu Ze was giving off caused him to feel immense danger!

Bright silver colored lines of ice appeared after another from the

Ice Drake Sword as the air in front of him became densely packed with cold air. The strands of ice seemingly entered that space and divided the space into numerous fragments.

Afterwards, the mass of nebula light, which was in the shape of a ball, that mysterious, revolving nebula mass, entered that space. Like a millstone, it grinded all of the silver strands into bits and pieces!

Every strand of silver ice was ripped and torn asunder!

“Whoosh!”

A group of sacred, pure white, starlights suddenly shot out of the nebula mass, penetrated through the fragmented strands of silver ice, and reached Yan Ziqian’s chest.

“Splurt!”

A bloody hole the size of a thumb appeared Yan Ziqian’s chest, spurting blood.

Yan Ziqian looked down, staring at the bloody hole as a look of shock emerged on his face. It seemed as if he hadn’t realized what had happened, as if he hadn’t yet felt the pain…

The next moment, a miserable, tragic cry emitted from his mouth.

This was the first time Tu Ze had injured him!

During the countless times the two had fought within the stone forest, it had always been him inflicting injuries on Tu Ze as he pleased.

Tu Ze had only been able to passively endure, never able to leave a single mark on Yan Ziqian's body!

But today, right when Tu Ze was on the brink of death — who knew if it was due to some sudden flashback or some sudden grace of the heavens — Tu Ze's aura had suddenly erupted as if he had finally become able to unleash the most profound mystery of the Nebula Art!

This was the first time, the first time that Tu Ze had left a wound on his chest, and it was one which caused him to uncontrollably cry in misery!

"Qin Lie!"

After his strike, Tu Ze didn't take the opportunity to go for the kill; instead he suddenly backed off. Tears appeared within his fierce eyes as he stared at the person behind him.

The emotions which exuded out from his eyes caused everyone else to look as well!

Qin Lie had no clue what to say, and he could only deeply nod at Tu Ze as he grit his teeth and clenched his fist, making a fierce hammering gesture.

“Good! Good brother! Haha!” Tu Ze understood, suddenly opening his mouth and laughing wildly as he growled, “I’ll beat that bastard to death!”

He immediately raised his longblade, and the aura around his body shimmered like a rainbow which carried some starlight as he once again attacked Yan Ziqian.

As the longblade moved, masses of nebula light continuously condensed and emerged from within the blade. Those masses of nebula radiance were like balls of light and were all under Tu Ze’s command!

One ball of light after another condensed from the surging spirit energy, each one containing nebula essence and revolving, glowing, stars. They surrounded Yan Ziqian and endlessly circled around him.

When the silver colored strand of ice, which shot out of the Ice Drake Sword, collided with a ball of light, the strand would instantly shatter.

The Ice Drake Sword had been completely repressed!

“Th-this is?”

“How could it be like this?”

“Just now, Tu Ze was on the brink of death, why is it like this?”

“I don’t understand, I completely don’t understand! Too abnormal, this in its entirety is too abnormal!”

The eyes of the girls of Water Moon Sect all opened wider as they watched Tu Ze and Yan Ziqian’s fight. They saw Tu Ze suddenly demonstrate great power, forcing Yan Ziqian into a corner and bombarding him as Tu Ze left one fresh wound after another on Yan Ziqian’s body.

They were unable to fathom what had happened and had no way to find out.

“There is only one explanation.”

Na Nuo’s pretty face showed some surprise as her eyes wandered onto not Yan Ziqian nor Tu Ze but...

She looked at Qin Lie!

“That new longblade is incredibly suited for Tu Ze. It truly can brilliantly display all of the incredible power of his Nebula Art! The grade of that blade must surpass that of the Ice Drake Sword’s, and thus, Tu Ze’s power was able to instantly rise to new heights!”

exclaimed Na Nuo.

“Eh? This, how could this be? Wasn’t Tu Ze’s new blade damaged during forging?”

“That’s right, how could a defective product be so powerful?”

“It’s definitely not like that!”

“Defective product?” Na Nuo narrowed her eyes as her expression became perplexed. “The grade of that blade is definitely the same as my Formless Ruler! If a spirit artifact of this level of was considered a damaged product, then the spirit artifacts that you all use would be considered scrap metal!”

After this remark was made, all of the girls of Water Moon Sect showed looks of horror.

Also, at this very moment, their eyes finally shifted from the bodies of Tu Ze and Yan Ziqian onto Qin Lie’s...

“Miss.” The eyes of Liang Zhong, who was seated atop the Profound Nether Beast, also brightened as he looked towards the longblade within Tu Ze’s hand, nodding as he said, “That spirit artifact was able to greatly increase Tu Ze’s power, as if it was made just for him, as if it was specially forged to coordinate with his spirit art. Even its quality is of a higher grade. It seems it is stronger than that ice sword by a bit.”

“Mn.” Xie Jingxuan was shocked as she inwardly nodded.

“Big Brother Tu! Big Brother Tu, are you okay?”

“Eh?! What happened? Big Brother Tu has gone mad?”

“He turned the tide? Heavens! I wasn’t seeing things, right?”

“……”

Kang Zhi, Han Feng, and Chu Peng finally regained their senses, each one beginning to clamor as they looked excitedly at one another.

On the other end, Zhuo Qian also became excited. Suddenly, a sword sliced across her leather chestplate, sending a piece of leather flying and baring a part of her satiny, white breasts.

Feng Kai snorted, acting like he didn’t see anything, his heart like iron ore as he continued to try and take her life with his sword.

“Qin Lie, don’t come over here! Quickly, go and help Zhuo Qian!” shouted Tu Ze without turning around. He was circling and bombarding Yan Ziqian, his longblade condensing new masses of light every once in a while.

Qin Lie suddenly reacted, quickly looking over at Zhuo Qian. He immediately discovered the precarious situation she was in.

Afterwards, he didn't immediately move, instead shouting to Zhuo Qian, "Sister Qian, test out your new Dragon Bone Whip around your waist. Perhaps... you will like it!"

Previously, he didn't dare to presume that the longblade would truly suit Tu Ze. Thus, when he gave it to Tu Ze, he had also been intently observing, ready to jump in at any moment to help Tu Ze block Yan Ziqian's attacks.

He had felt uneasy in his heart, afraid that the spirit diagram that he had repaired would be unable to release the power of a spirit artifact and make Tu Ze's circumstances even worse.

—After all, he had no experiences in this matter.

But now, after seeing Tu Ze's result, he realized that the effects of the spirit artifact after he repaired its spirit diagram... weren't that bad.

Thus, he believed that the Dragon Bone Whip also shouldn't be that poor and could possibly help Zhuo Qian. That was why he shouted this time.

"Zhuo Qian! Listen to Qin Lie!" leisurely shouted Tu Ze in a loud voice.

"My new Dragon Bone Whip..."

On her end, Zhuo Qian retreated another bit, taking the

opportunity to grab the Dragon Bone Whip that Qin Lie had wrapped around her waist."

The moment her hand touched it, Zhuo Qian's eyes lit up with surprise. In her heart, she suddenly had a feeling — that this new Dragon Bone Whip was created for her! It existed entirely for her!

This feeling was extremely powerful! It was powerful to the point that Zhuo Qian almost immediately threw away the old Dragon Bone Whip!

She immediately pulled out the new Dragon Bone Whip from her hip. The instant that the whip was snapped, it was as if it had suddenly turned into a soaring wind dragon!

"Whoosh whoosh!"

The whip moved with the wind, condensing a thick layer of wind atop its body, forming a wind barrier, transforming into a twisting wind dragon.

The wind dragon was interlinked with Zhuo Qian and flew perfectly according to Zhuo Qian's mental orders. It was able to perfectly display the spirit art which she had cultivated!

Wielding the Dragon Bone Whip, she had the wonderful feeling of another hand holding her own. This feeling was incomparable and felt too good to be true.

“This… this is the spirit artifact that I’ve been dreaming for!”

Zhuo Qian let out a great whoop in her mind, excited to the point that her body slightly shivered. Her eyes began to glow with light as her aura instantly increased by a level.

“Whoosh whoosh whoosh!”

An intelligent, twisting wind dragon that was a few meters long weaved around Zhuo Qian, making various biting moves in Feng Kai’s direction.

Feng Kai suddenly felt as if the wind resistance around him had suddenly increased a level as the range for his actions became smaller and smaller. His movement became increasingly restricted, as if he were trying to rush through a fierce gale. He was pressured by the wild wind to the point where everything he did felt uncomfortable.

“Shoo shoo shoo!”

A sharp blade of wind suddenly shot out from within the Dragon Bone Whip, rustling up a shocking whistle in the air as it grazed Feng Kai’s abdomen.

“Splurt!”

Atop Feng Kai’s lower abdomen, a long wound that exposed his bones suddenly appeared.

“Feng Kai! Go to hell!”

Zhuo Qian who had previously been backed into a corner and seemed about to collapse with her body full of wounds, suddenly began to shout wildly as if she had become a completely different person. Her body overflowed with a shocking vitality.

……

Chapter 85: Reversal!

The tides had suddenly turned within the valley!

Before Qin Lie had arrived, Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian were being beaten black and blue. Kang Zhi, Han Feng, Chu Peng, and the rest were also in dangerous situations. With each passing moment, they would acquire more and more wounds.

Especially Tu Ze, who had been pushed to insanity by Yan Ziqian as he risked his life to take Yan Ziqian's.

But it was clear to everyone that if his situation continued without change, Yan Ziqian would survive and only Tu Ze would die.

As soon as Tu Ze died, Zhuo Qian would be killed shortly after, followed by Kang Zhi and the rest.

Their situation was originally one of certain death.

But due to Qin Lie's arrival, the situation in the valley had undergone a heaven-turning earth-shaking change!

Currently, the new longblade Tu Ze was wielding was constantly condensing masses of starlight. These masses of light were like giant pieces of shiny crystals as they bombarded Yan Ziqian!

Atop Yan Ziqian's tall body, there were now a dozen or so bone deep wounds! The number of wounds on his body were quickly approaching how many wounds Tu Ze had suffered over the last few days!

On the other end, Zhuo Qian, who had switched out the new Dragon Bone Whip seemed to have similarly become a new person. Her aura was like a tiger's as she began to turn the tide, also forcing her opponent, Feng Kai, into a corner.

Countless whip marks marred Feng Kai's entire body. His abdomen, shoulders, and left cheek had all suffered wounds from the wind blades with fresh blood dripping down his body.

After Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian switched their spirit artifacts, their auras had erupted, their power climbing to new heights as they began to dominate their opponents!

Qin Lie, who no longer had to worry about Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, returned to his senses as he too entered the fray, helping Han Feng, Kang Zhi, and Chu Peng fight their enemies.

He was a cultivator of the ninth level of the Refinement Realm. Lightning wound around his body, and the sound of thunder emanated between his strikes. At this point, when fighting against martial practitioners at the same level as him, Qin Lie was like a fierce beast within a group of sheep. Absolutely no one was able to contend against him.

He seemingly didn't even care about his opponent's attacks,

completely relying on the advantage of his extremely tough body. Simply charging in, he collided with his enemies. It was as if an iron ship or giant car had crashed straight into the Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners.

All of the people who he smashed into were immediately sent pedaling backwards with blood flying from the corners of their mouths. Once those people finally regained their footing, an electric current discharged across their body, numbing them and charring their hair.

His disruption freed up Han Feng, Kang Zhi, and Chu Peng, further extending the advantage for those of Nebula Pavilion!

"I truly don't dare to believe it. Earlier, all of Nebula Pavilion's people were on the verge of dying. But now, they somehow managed to completely reverse the situation!"

"Conflict can truly change ten thousand times in a moment."

"Why would it be like this?"

As the young ladies of Water Moon Sect observed the battle within the valley with their glowing eyes, they whispered amongst each other.

"It's because of those two spirit artifacts and that one person," softly explained Na Nuo as she stared at Qin Lie, a curious light flashing through her eyes.

All of the gazes of the young ladies of Water Moon Sect transferred over to Qin Lie as various colors rippled through their eyes.

By this time, all of Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners had lost. Even Yan Ziqian was drenched in fresh blood. Based on his usual temperament, upon seeing the poor situation they were in, he would have since long ago calmly called for a retreat and quickly brought his people away.

However, he currently acted as if he still had the advantage as before.

—This was because the young ladies of Water Moon Sect were watching.

"Miss, what do you think?" said Liang Zhong atop the Profound Nether Beast as he slightly furrowed his brows, "If this situation continues, I fear the outcome will not be very good..."

"We cannot treat them differently. Earlier, we didn't immediately take action, so we must do the same now," indifferently responded Xie Jingxuan, indicating that she wasn't going to do anything. "Just be on the lookout. As long as no one dies, there is no problem."

"Understood."

Liang Zhong nodded. Afterwards, he hopped off the Profound Nether Beast and walked towards the center of the valley, arriving next to where the Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners were fighting. With an indifferent attitude, he continued to watch.

His arrival didn't attract any attention from Shattered Ice Manor nor Nebula Pavilion's youths. It only grabbed the attention of Water Moon Sect's young ladies.

"Sister Na Nuo... this person?" whispered Little Sparrow.

Na Nuo slightly shook her head, indicating that she too wasn't very clear on Liang Zhong's background and identity. She calmed down the sisters behind her with the expression in her eyes, then continued to quietly wait and observe.

The young ladies of Water Moon Sect suddenly all became silent.

"Crack!"

The sound of broken bones emanated out from the chest of the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioner who had previously been exchanging blows with Chu Peng. The person flew back two meters before falling onto the ground, their body spasming as an electric current discharged in their eyes.

Qin Lie's expression became heavy as he walked forward, ready to deal the killing blow.

At this moment, Liang Zhong suddenly appeared in front of him, slowly shaking his head.

Qin Lie's brows furrowed as he asked, "Why didn't you step in earlier?"

"If just now Tu Ze had arrived right at the brink of death..." calmly said Liang Zhong, "we would also have stepped in."

"There's no problem as long as they don't die, is that right?" asked Qin Lie.

Liang Zhong nodded.

Qin Lie immediately turned around, locking onto another Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioner. Coldly sneering, he once again charged over.

"Snap snap snap!"

The hair standing sounds of bones fracturing quickly resounded from where Qin Lie was. Upon hearing these sounds, the pretty faces of the young ladies of Water Moon Sect all became slightly pale.

—Qin Lie was like a heavily armored car. When he had crashed into the person, that person's bones emitted exploding sounds as

blood surged out of their body like a geyser!

Liang Zhong was stunned as he helplessly looked to Xie Jingxuan, only to discover that she didn't react at all, as if she were seemingly used to the brutal actions of Qin Lie.

"Arghhh!"

A painful roar came from Yan Qingsong's mouth, suddenly attracting everyone's attention.

The battle between Gao Yu and Yan Qingsong previously had nothing worth watching as both sides were seemingly well matched, with no one having a distinct advantage over the other.

Thus, this battle between the two had gradually been forgotten by everyone.

Suddenly, after who knew what happened, great fear flickered in Yan Qingsong's eyes as he frantically retreated; it was as if he had seen a ghost.

Around Yan Qingsong's neck was a circular cluster of dense, gray clouds. These clouds were like a restrictive collar, constantly tightening.

From amidst the cloud cluster resonated the gloomy, mournful sound of moaning ghosts which pierced into everyone's hearts, causing them to feel as if they had fallen into the ninth level of

hell!

Entwined around Gao Yu's body was a circle of black smoke. Within the black smoke, various tormented spirits and dead souls writhed. Along with his dark, eccentric eyes, he gave off an extremely evil vibe.

When Liang Zhong and Xie Jingxuan, who were on top of the Profound Nether Beast, noticed Gao Yu's eccentricities, their complexions changed slightly.

Liang Zhong, no longer caring about how badly Qin Lie ravaged Shattered Ice Manor's practitioners, suddenly shouted towards Gao Yu, "Kid, don't go overboard!"

He suddenly appeared between Gao Yu and Yan Qingsong.

After Liang Zhong arrived, the ghost cloud collar, which had been encircling Yan Qingsong's neck, suddenly flew away, instantly diffusing into the black smoke around Gao Yu's body.

Yan Qingsong's constantly spluttered out unintelligible words as he continued to back away, his eyes still filled with sheer terror as his body trembled in fear. It was as if he had been invaded by an evil devil and had his soul injured.

"Who are you? To care so much about matters not related to you!"

Gao Yu's face became gloomy as the another wail came from the evil spirit within the Ogre-faced Ring. Immediately, cluster after cluster of dense, gray masses of air appeared, moving towards Liang Zhong's chest.

Liang Zhong's eyes became cold as he suddenly snorted and opened his mouth, spitting out a ray of blue light.

The blue light was like flowing water yet sharp as a blade of light, cutting all of the masses of air to pieces!

Gao Yu's face suddenly became pale. He couldn't help but back up a few steps as he looked at Liang Zhong with hatred. He indeed didn't dare to make another move.

"Hold your attacks! Everyone hold your attacks! Who allowed you to fight?"

At this time, a deep, male voice sounded out over from the entrance of the valley. A middle aged man wearing the uniform of Dark Asura Hall angrily rushed over.

Following behind him were ten or so Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners.

Once these people arrived, they immediately began to forcefully interfere, strictly stopping the clashes between Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion.

“What were you doing earlier?” coldly snorted Liang Zhong.

Upon hearing Liang Zhong’s voice, the middle aged man suddenly reacted. Looking towards the corner where Gao Yu and Yan Qingsong had been fighting, he suddenly became surprised as he walked over and respectfully saluted, saying, “Mister Liang, when did you return home? Where is milady?”

“Hmph!” responded Liang Zhong, his face becoming cold as he looked at Xie Jingxuan in the distance. “Do you not have eyes?”

The group of Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners suddenly came to their senses. They, who had just stopped the fights between Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion, all hurriedly moved over next to Xie Jingxuan, who was atop the Profound Nether Beast. One after another, they bowed and respectfully saluted, “Greetings, milady!”

Qin Lie, Tu Ze, and the rest, along with Na Nuo’s group, were all stunned as they looked towards Xie Jingxuan.

Atop the Profound Nether Beast, Xie Jingxuan was indifferent as she nodded, asking, “Ban Hong, what has the situation been like recently?”

“It’s become even worse,” replied the middle aged man called Ban Hong. He was the person in charge, stationed in this area of the natural stone forest, and was the leader of this group of Dark Asura Hall practitioners. Holding his salute, he respectfully continued, “The situation has become even worse than when

milady left.”

Tu Ze, Na Nuo, and the rest were all dumbfounded.

They all knew that the deepest parts of this natural stone forest had constantly been under the control of Dark Asura Hall... the deepest parts of the natural stone forest was a place they weren’t allowed to enter.

Thus, none of them had any clue what strange things existed the deepest parts of the natural stone forest.

But they had all known since long ago that there was definitely something strange within the depths of the stone forest. Otherwise, Dark Asura Hall would never have stationed people there.

If it were only a Rank Two spirit beast, they could have simply relied on the power of the four vassals to deal with it. For Dark Asura Hall to explicitly send people over was indeed strange.

Currently, as they listened to Ban Hong’s conversation with Xie Jingxuan, they finally understood. There was actually something here that was even more powerful than Ban Hong!

Xie Jingxuan was the actual person in charge here. As for Ban Hong... he was clearly just a subordinate.

They could also finally could say for sure that there was

something strange within the depths of the stone forest.

Xie Jingxuan's clear eyes swept across the faces of everyone within the valley. Every person she looked at would show an expression of reverence as they slightly bowed in respect.

"If Shattered Ice Manor and Nebula Pavilion come into conflict again within the stone forest, the provokers will be executed on the spot!" sternly reprimanded Xie Jianxuan, her expression suddenly becoming cold. Immediately, she took out a card and raised it, continuing, "Water Moon Sect, Crimson Flame Association, Shattered Ice Manor, and Nebula Pavilion, continue patrolling the outer edges of the stone forest. If there are spirit beasts, you may continue to kill them, but you are prohibited from entering the areas marked as restricted by the Dark Asura Hall! Do you understand?"

"Understood!" responded Tu Ze, Yan Ziqian, and Na Nuo in unison as they nodded. They didn't dare show the slightest hesitation.

They had clearly seen that the card within Xie Jingxuan's hand was an identity card of Dark Asura Hall's Department of Internal Affairs!

It was a command token which demanded their lives!

Even if Xie Jingxuan commanded them to go to their deaths, the would be unable to disobey the order!

“All those who are not affiliated, remain here. Qin Lie, come with me,” continued Xie Jingxuan.

Everyone became filled with surprise as they all subconsciously turned their attention back to Qin Lie. They were curious, curious as to what kind of relationship Qin Lie had with this leading practitioner of Dark Asura Hall.

……

Chapter 86: Taking With Force

“Could you let me stay for another moment? I have some words I want to say to Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian,” requested Qin Lie.

Xie Jingxuan glanced at Qin Lie, slightly furrowing her brows before nodding and saying, “Ban Hong, come with me. I need to be updated on the situation.” Riding atop the Profound Nether Beast, she moved towards the depths of the stone forest.

Within the rugged stone forest, there were certain paths which were difficult for martial practitioners to tread. However, it was all like smooth ground to the Profound Nether Beast which advanced at a swift pace.

After bowing to Liang Zhong, Ban Hong brought a group of Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners and followed after Xie Jingxuan.

Liang Zhong temporarily stayed behind, observing Gao Yu with narrowed eyes and furrowed brows. His line of sight was directed at the black smoke currently twined around Gao Yu’s body which had yet to disperse. He seemed to be considering something.

At this moment, Yan Ziqian and the wounded practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor gathered together, all of them supporting each other. Their expressions were all extremely ugly.

Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai were both bloody, their shoulders and abdomens showing extremely deep cuts. Their faces were gloomy as they busily bound their wounds.

Yan Qingsong, however, was the most tragic.

He seemingly had yet to wake from the illusion, his face still pale as his eyes showed a dazed look of horror. Unintelligible words were still incessantly spewing out from his mouth.

As for Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's group, their situation wasn't much better. They were also covered in wounds and were also busily binding them.

However, unlike Yan Ziqian and his group, Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the rest were all in high spirits, their faces showing a look of inexplicable excitement and glee.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian tightly clutched their new spirit artifacts — the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip, lovingly waving them around. They didn't want to put them down for even a second.

—It was as if the two of them were holding onto their own lives!

"Qin Lie! Th-this longblade..."

Tu Ze's eyes flushed. As he profoundly looked at Qin Lie, his face was full of excitement. Because he was so excited, he became unable to completely say what he was thinking.

"What exactly happened?"

Zhuo Qian walked forward a step, repeatedly patting Qin Lie's shoulder. Her bright face was full of smiles.

"Qin Lie, didn't Great Master Lu fail to truly forge the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip? How come these two defective products seemed to have been reactivated once they landed in your hands?" asked little fatty Kang Zhi in place of the two, verbalizing the confusion in their minds.

Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai were still treating their wounds, but upon hearing what Kang Zhi had said, they were both shocked for a moment and suddenly turned their heads to Nebula Pavilion's area.

"They were reactivated?"

Over where Water Moon Sect's was, Na Nuo and the other young ladies were also shocked. Their dazzling gazes also gathered upon Qin Lie's body as uncertainty emerged within their minds: Could it be that it was all because of him?

"Previously, the spirit diagrams within the longblade and Dragon Bone Whip were incomplete. I-I just asked someone to help me complete them."

Halfway through his response, Qin Lie suddenly remembered Li Mu's constant reminder that he shouldn't reveal that he was the one who had completed the spirit diagrams in case it attracted unnecessary trouble, as that would be too shocking.

“You asked someone to complete the spirit diagrams?” Tu Ze’s entire face lit up. “Th-that person is definitely a peak level Artificer! He was able to complete the spirit diagrams that Great Master Lu failed to perfectly fuse, and the effects… the effects are so — so incredibly unimaginable! That person must have definitely been an extraordinary Artificer!”

Tu Ze’s words were a little incoherent.

It was because he just loved his longblade too much. He currently dared to affirm that this spirit artifact was taken from dreams — that it was a treasure made just for him!

“His attainments with spirit artifacts have definitely surpassed Great Master Lu by a level. Otherwise, there would definitely have been no way for him to have successfully completed these spirit diagrams!” concluded Zhuo Qian with a hundred percent certainty. Afterwards, she perplexedly asked, “Qin Lie, how come you apprenticed yourself to Master Yao even though you know such an amazing person?”

“Uh, th-this…” Qin Lie stuttered.

“Little brother, could I borrow the longblade for a moment, I just want to take a look.” On the other side, Liang Zhong seemed to have thought of something. His body flickering, he arrived at their side from beside Gao Yu like a ghost, his brows furrowed as he reached his hand out towards Tu Ze.

Liang Zhong was a person of Dark Asura Hall and someone who even Ban Hong had to respectfully refer to as Mister Liang. Thus, Tu Ze didn't dare displease him and obediently handed him the longblade after a moment's hesitation.

Liang Zhong received the blade. After perceiving it with narrowed eyes for a few seconds, his expression slightly changed as he handed the longblade back to Tu Ze. Immediately, he turned to Zhuo Qian and asked, "Little girl, please also lend me your whip."

"You better be careful. Don't destroy it," said Zhuo Qian, reluctantly handing it over. Her movements were very careful, making the whip seem more important than her life.

"Be at ease," consoled Liang Zhong. Receiving the Dragon Bone Whip, he once again perceived it with narrowed eyes for a moment before handing it back to its rightful owner. A look of astonishment emerged within his eyes.

Without saying another word, he nodded to the several people before moving back towards Gao Yu's side with furrowed brows. It seemed as if he were pondering something.

Very quickly, Liang Zhong seemed to have become content, as if he had already understood the critical details.

"Let's go." Once Yan Ziqian had simply bound his wounds, he stood up with a cold face. Along with Feng Kai and the other Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners, they supported each other as they walked towards the outer ring of the valley.

“You guys don’t want your stuff?” lightly asked Na Nuo.

“The three Rank Two spirit beasts within the valley were first discovered by us. It was only because Yan Qingsong followed after us that he found out about them,” snorted Kang Zhi as he looked at the three spirit beast corpses. “Thus, at least a half of these spirit beasts belongs to us. It has no relation to Shattered Ice Manor.”

“That’s right!” exclaimed Tu Ze startledly. Wielding his longblade which was resplendent with starlight, he swept his eyes over the people slumping away in front of him, overbearingly saying, “Shattered Ice Manor’s portion will be considered Nebula Pavilion’s!”

“Tu Ze! You dare!” shouted Yan Ziqian, his eyes becoming a deep crimson. The faces of the other Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners also became twisted, as if they wanted to continue their bloody battle.

“What? Not satisfied?” asked Zhuo Qian as she unsheathed her Dragon Bone Whip, a ferocious look emerging within her eyes. “Haven’t you guys done this time and time again? These last two months, say it yourselves, just how much loot have you guys taken from us? What? Now that it’s become our turn for once, you guys can’t stand it?”

She cracked the Dragon Bone Whip and the wind dragon once again condensed. “If you’re not satisfied, then you can talk with my whip!”

Previously, because Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian were no match for Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai, Shattered Ice Manor's people had constantly shadowed Tu Ze's group and deliberately tried to provoke them. Every time Tu Ze's group killed a spirit beast, they would immediately swoop out and say that they had been chasing it first, forcing Tu Ze's group to give up their spoils.

But now, the tides had turned, and Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian held the advantage. Learning from Shattered Ice Manor's actions, they finally did something detestable.

"Good! Very good!" Yan Ziqian deeply glared at the two for few moments, his face as cold as ice. Afterwards, he looked at Qin Lie once more. Nodding, he said, "Qin Lie, Qin Lie..."

As he repeatedly uttered Qin Lie's name, he led Feng Kai and the rest of Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners directly out of the valley.

Everyone could hear the deep-seated hatred contained within Yan Ziqian's voice as he repeated Qin Lie's name over and over again. All of them knew that, without a doubt, if Qin Lie ever fell into his hands, he would experience extremely cruel treatment.

And thus, Shattered Ice Manor's people left the valley.

"What do you all think?" asked Zhuo Qian, suddenly looking at Na Nuo.

“There’s no problem,” said Na Nuo, casually shrugging her shoulders. “After all, it was originally Shattered Ice Manor’s. Moreover, it’s only a portion of spirit materials from the body of the Poison Scale Scorpion and Golden Haired Ape. Haha, since they themselves didn’t have a problem with it and gave it up, what can my Water Moon Sect say about it?”

“Then it’s settled,” coldly sneered Zhuo Qian, who seemingly didn’t like Na Nuo. She slightly nodded.

“Qin Lie! You brat, you really came at the perfect time!”

At this time, Tu Ze, Kang Zhi, and the rest finally cheered up. One by one, they took turns, tightly hugging Qin Lie in the fashion that men used to express their excitement.

Very quickly, Tu Ze, Kang Zhi, and Chu Peng had all taken their turns and hugged Qin Lie once.

Laughing, Zhuo Qian, under the ambiguous gazes of the rest, boldly walked out next to Qin Lie and also tightly hugged him. Her fragrant lips touched Qin Lie’s ear as she whispered, “Thank you...” Immediately, she gently laughed and let go, her cheeks slightly blushing.

“That person of Dark Asura Hall... what happened? How come you showed up with her?” suddenly asked Tu Ze afterwards.

“Gao Yu, where are you going?” Right as he was about to answer, he suddenly saw the gloomy faced Gao Yu who was passing by Liang Zhong and heading in the same direction as Xie Jingxuan and Ban Hong. Qin Lie hurriedly left Tu Ze’s group and arrived beside Gao Yu, asking, “How come you are here as well?”

“Brat, you better behave for me,” coldly shouted Liang Zhong, his eyes still stuck on Gao Yu.

Amongst the entirety of Nebula Pavilion, Qin Lie was Gao Yu’s only friend. Their friendship had been created during their time at Celestial Wolf Mountain. When he had interacted with the others, he treated them coldly and with disregard, not giving them any face.

However, after Qin Lie had arrived, the coldness on Gao Yu’s face finally showed some ease as he began to converse with Qin Lie.

“I was hunting high rank spirit beasts around Icestone City with Elder Ye and his group. Not too long ago, we attacked a Rank Two Ice Soul Python. We managed to kill it, but also lost a few brothers.

“At that time, a cluster of dark black clouds suddenly drifted above us. That thing sucked away the soul of the Ice Soul Python as well as the ones of those Discipline Hall brothers who had just died. All of the souls were taken up into the sky by it…”

“You know, the spirit art that I cultivate is a little special. These kinds of things, while others cannot sense it, I am very sensitive to.”

“Later, when I paid more attention, I discovered that, after every battle with spirit beasts, a cluster of black clouds would appear above in the sky. With the end of each of our battles, the black clouds would suck away the souls of the spirit beasts and martial practitioners before they quickly dissipated back into the world. Most recently, one of my Discipline Hall brothers suffered a serious injury, but had yet to die. Yet, his soul… was still sucked away.”

“Relying on my sensitivity to souls, I followed it over from outside, chasing it all the way to within the stone forest, to right here. At that time, when I arrived, the souls of these three spirit beasts were also sucked away by the black clouds. Those black clouds… moved towards the depths of the stone forest. I must go investigate and clearly figure out what happened!”

Gao Yu clearly stated his reasons.

Upon hearing Gao Yu’s explanation, the expressions of Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and a group of ladies from Water Moon Sect all slightly changed. Their hairs were all on end as they became restless after Gao Yu’s words.

“Now that you mention it, I remember that, three days ago, when we were fighting these three spirit beasts, there was seemingly… seemingly a cluster of black clouds in the sky above us,” said Na Nuo, shocked.

Black clouds? A mysterious existence which sucked souls?

A chill also emerged within the depths of Qin Lie's heart. He knew that regardless of whether it was a martial practitioner or spirit beast, they all had souls. Furthermore, regardless of whether a martial practitioner or spirit beast became stronger, their soul would also become stronger. Once martial practitioners reached a certain level, they would even have to specially cultivate their souls. The souls of some powerful practitioners could even leave their flesh...

Once a martial practitioner or spirit beast died, their souls would slowly disperse, returning to the world.

The black clouds could amalgamate dead souls before they were able to dissipate. Just this was evil enough to cause everyone who listened to feel a little scared.

Surprisingly, at this time, Liang Zhong's eyes, which had previously been filled with displeasure towards Gao Yu, suddenly slightly lit up. "You're saying that you chased the black clouds here from all the way by the outskirts of Icestone City? You can... sense its movements?"

"Mn." Gao Yu nodded, then pointed towards the depths of the stone forest. After pondering for a moment, the expression in his eyes suddenly rippled, as if he too felt some uneasiness. However, he grit his teeth and gloomily said, "It's in there, just follow the direction I'm pointing. A-also, there are a lot of those things!"

After his remark, everyone's hearts froze as they looked in the

direction that Gao Yu pointed.

—It was indeed the direction that Xie Jingxuan, Ban Hong, and the others had proceeded in earlier.

Chapter 87: Soul Devouring Beast

Qin Lie, Tu Ze, Na Nuo, and the others were shocked by Gao Yu's words and looked in the direction he was pointing.

At this moment, Liang Zhong suddenly spoke, "You are Gao Yu? You can come with Qin Lie and I into the depths of the stone forest and help with our mission."

Gao Yu's face was dark. "What mission?"

"You will naturally learn." Liang Zhong's brow creased. "You are also of Nebula Pavilion, so you must comply with our orders. You and Qin Lie will come with me. The others are not permitted to enter. Mn, you will naturally understand what you are curious about now if you come with us. You will find out what those black clouds are."

Finishing, Liang Zhong walked towards the depths of the stone forest and motioned for Qin Lie and Gao Yu to follow.

"Qin Lie, what's going on?" Tu Ze asked with shock.

Zhuo Qian, Na Nuo and the others also looked at him in hopes that he would spill a bit of information to dispel some of their confusion.

"I really don't know."

Qin Lie shook his head. Seeing Liang Zhong's impatient face, he could not say more. He could only follow with Gao Yu behind Liang Zhong's Profound Nether Beast as they walked further into the depths of the stone forest.

"Tu Ze, how is he at Nebula Pavilion? I've never heard of him before, what are his origins?" After Qin Lie and Gao Yu departed, Na Nuo's eyes turned as she looked at Zhuo Qian and asked with giggles, "Is he like her, also coming down from Dark Asura Hall to gain experience with your Nebula Pavilion? Who's his important father?"

The young females of Water Moon Sect also crowded over and prattled their inquiries.

Qin Lie's arrival had turned the tides of the battle for Tu Ze and the others. He also knew someone that successfully repaired Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's failed spirit artifacts. Not only that, but he also seemed to be following Xie Jingxuan and had a large connection to Dark Asura Hall...

They naturally believed that Qin Lie was of extraordinary origins as Zhuo Qian, and that Qin Lie's identity was of someone even more important.

"Nothing to do with you." Before Tu Ze could reply, Zhuo Qian snorted and then frowned. "Divide the spirit materials up quickly. We still need to find a place to heal our wounds, so we can't afford to waste any time here."

Na Nuo's face was slightly cold. "The bodies of the spirit beasts are all here. You can cut Shattered Ice Manor's section, and we can do the remainder ourselves."

"Chu Peng, Kang Zhi!" Zhuo Qian ordered, "You two take the work. We will be leaving here soon, do not waste time."

Kang Zhi, Han Feng, and the others had wanted to converse more with the youthful females of Water Moon Sect. Hearing Zhuo Qian order them, they could only helplessly start on their tasks.

Tu Ze sat down to the side and swallowed a few medicinal pills to heal his injuries.

Na Nuo glanced over in this direction but did not speak anymore as though she found it uninteresting. Instead, all she did was silently wait with the group of females.

……

Qin Lie and Gao Yu followed behind the Profound Nether Beast past a patch of high stone peaks to a strange place where peculiar stones formed a forest.

In this area, the stones were as straight as swords, their tips pointing towards the sky forming a sword forest.

The surroundings were dark and cold, exuding an uncomfortable feeling. However, the natural energies in this place were extremely

abundant, much better than anywhere else within the stone forest.

—Under a sword-shaped rock, Xie Jingxuan continued to sit on the Profound Nether Beast as she listened to Ban Hong's report.

There were many Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners scattered about. All of them were respectful, but there was clear worry between their brows as though they were unsettled by some matter.

Seeing Liang Zhong arriving with Qin Lie and Gao Yu, Xie Jingxuan showed some slight astonishment and stopped Ban Hong. Having Ban Hong step aside, she then motioned for Liang Zhong to come forward.

The Profound Nether Beast that Liang Zhong was riding moved forward. He knew what she wanted to ask and explained preemptively, "This boy is Gao Yu. He has been pursuing a soul fragment of the Soul Devouring Beast from Icestone City. The boy says he can feel the presence of the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragment. Just now, when we were outside, he pointed to the area we put our highest priority on and said that there are more soul fragments of the Soul Devouring Beast there..."

Xie Jingxuan's eyes grew slightly brighter as she looked to Gao Yu. "He is that sensitive to soul?"

"Mn, the spirit art the boy is cultivating is special, it seems... to be the kind of spell that can control vengeful spirits." Liang Zhong lowered his voice, "This kind of art is hard to find and extremely

difficult to cultivate. Additionally, it is hard to accomplish anything with it. Even within Dark Asura Hall, there are rarely people that cultivate such a dark and unpredictable spirit art. I felt that he would be of use, so I brought him as well."

Xie Jingxuan nodded slightly.

"Miss, I just recently inspected the spirit artifacts in Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's possession. The spirit diagrams that were mended... was completed by the same person who made the spirit diagrams in the Spirit Gathering Boards," Liang Zong said in a deep voice.

"Hm?" Xie Jingxuan did not understand.

"It's like this," Liang Zhong explained, "Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had invited Great Master Lu to forge the spirit artifacts but problems happened in the process; supposedly, the spirit diagrams were in conflict. As a result... Great Master Lu did not complete either of the two spirit artifacts and caused both spirit artifacts to become defective. Qin Lie took the two defective artifacts and said he would seek someone to help complete the spirit diagrams. On the trip here, he gave the two spirit artifacts back to Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian..."

Liang Zhong paused and then said, "You saw the results as well. The two spirit artifacts perfectly complemented Tu Zi and Zhuo Qian's spirit arts as though they were made specifically for them and became a part of their user's bodies."

Xie Jingxuan's eyes lit up. "You mean?"

“Hehe, it seems the owner of Li’s Shop is a great artificer.” Liang Zhong’s face showed great respect. “He is able to give new life to the spirit artifacts that Great Master Lu had failed to make. This person’s skill in forging is definitely a level above Great Master Lu!”

“Are you sure it is him?” Xie Jingxuan murmured to herself.

“Of course, it has to be him.” Liang Zhong was very confident. “I have long been suspicious that the Spirit Gathering Boards were made by Li Mu’s hands. Even Armament Pavilion doesn’t have something this unique, and we never saw them anywhere else. Where would Li Mu get his inventory? The spirit diagrams inside these two spirit artifacts are the same as the ones in the Spirit Gathering Boards, isn’t that enough to show a connection?”

Xie Jingxuan thought and then nodded lightly. “It seems so.”

“When we go to Li’s Shop next time, we need to be more careful. Such a high level artificer must have a great background.” Liang Zhong’s expression was stern. “I will also get people to investigate this Li Mu’s true identity and examine his history.”

“Mn, if there are more Spirit Gathering Boards, we can probably relax this time, “ Xie Jingxuan said.

“Miss, what is the situation right now?” Liang Zhong inquired.

“Look for yourself.” Xie Jingxuan sighed lightly.

Liang Zhong’s face became heavy. He suddenly flew up from the Profound Nether Beast and nimbly climbed onto the largest stone peak. After he quickly got on top of the pillar, he looked on from his vantage point, ten meters high.

Upon looking down, he saw there was an area in the depths of the stone forest that was shrouded in black cloud, completely hiding what was within.

The black clouds moved as though they were alive and emitted an extremely dark, cold, and malicious presence. Even this far away, Liang Zhong could feel the terrifying ripples inside it.

There were many spirit beasts surrounding there, many of which were Rank Two. These spirit beasts gathered around the black cloud and closed off every path that lead in.

If one wanted to reach the thickest part of the black cloud, they had to kill spirit beasts and, at the very least, create a path themselves.

Liang Zhong’s brows were deeply locked. He made a rough calculation and found there were hundreds of Rank One spirit beasts and twenty to thirty Rank Two spirit beasts. It would be hard work to clean out a road, not very easy at all.

After watching for a while, Liang Zhong’s brow did not relax as

he said, “The situation is not optimistic.”

“Mn, we brought too few people and did not predict that so many spirit beasts would have gathered up. It is unlikely that making a path will be easy.” Xie Jingxuan thought for a while and said, “We might have to use Tu Ze, Na Nuo, and the others…”

“What does Miss plan to make them do?” Liang Zhong asked respectfully.

“They will gather and draw away spirit beasts from that side. At best, they can kill some and take some of the pressure off us.” Xie Jingxuan’s face was indifferent as she calmly continued, “We cannot expend too much energy on the spirit beasts or waste too much strength. The Soul Devouring Beast… is our goal and also our most important mission this time around.”

“The young ones are too weak. If they truly enrage the spirit beasts, there will be heavy losses,” Liang Zhong said worriedly.

“On this road, everyone must face hardship and contend with death at all times. I know that it really is a difficult task for them to face herd of spirit beasts, but we do not have any better solutions.” Xie Jingxuan was also helpless. She thought and then said, “When I was ten, I was already fighting in the first level of the Nether Battlefield and have ended up before death’s door many times. Unless they are baptized by blood, these people cannot be left in charge. They will never be even able to take a single step into Dark Asura Hall at any point in their lives. They otherwise cannot be of help to us.”

“Understood.” Liang Zhong listened for a while and inwardly sighed. He then nodded lightly. “I will arrange it.”

Six hours later.

Xiong Ba of Crimson Flame Association, Na Nuo of Water Moon Sect, Yan Ziqian who had just finished treating his wounds as well as Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the others all appeared in this area.

Everyone gathered.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu were also at the location and had shocked expressions as they looked at Liang Zhong who had gathered everyone.

“Originally, I hadn’t not planned to have you all participate, but the current situation is dire, and we need to borrow your strength to take a portion of the pressure from the spirit beasts off of us.” Liang Zhong came to the front of the members from all four factions and sat high up on his Profound Nether Beast as he said, “A Soul Devouring Beast has somehow escaped from the Nether Battlefield. Taking advantage of the chaotic battle between spirit beasts and martial practitioners in the Arctic Mountain Range, this Soul Devouring Beast has consumed a large number of soul and quickly evolved, rapidly increasing its strength.”

“Soul Devouring Beasts are spirit beasts of the Nether Battlefield. This Soul Devouring Beast evolves quickly. As the souls it consumes become stronger, it can continue to evolve without

limit! Rank Three Soul Devouring Beasts possess the ability to divide their souls. The main soul can be divided into dozens of soul fragments that can leave the body to search for and consume souls."

"The black cloud Gao Yu saw was one of the soul fragments of the Soul Devouring Beast that was consuming the souls of those who had just recently died to increase its strength."

"The fighting between spirit beast and martial practitioners in Arctic Mountain Range has been frequent. Many spirit beasts have died, and many of our martial practitioners have sacrificed themselves. This Soul Devouring Beast managed to catch this one in a thousand chance. When this Soul Devouring Beast came out of the Nether battlefield, it was just Rank One, and now it is Rank Three and progressing to becoming Rank Four. It is becoming even more frightening.

Liang Zhong pointed deep into the stone forest with a heavy expression. "Right now, it is in the depths of the stone forest. It will soon attempt to reach Rank Four. If you cannot kill it before it breaks into Rank Four, when that happens, it will acquire new abilities and become extremely difficult to kill. It will become a never-ending threat!"

Chapter 88: Split Mobilization

“Nether Battlefield, Soul Devouring Beast, Rank Three, Rank Four…”

Qin Lie, Gao Yu, and the others listened attentively to Liang Zhong’s explanation, and as it went on, they became paler and paler.

Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, Na Nuo, Yan Ziqian, and Xiong Ba seemed to know a bit where the Soul Devouring Beast came from and had heard about Nether Battlefield’s situation before. When Liang Zhong was halfway through his explanation, their hearts already felt cold and their faces were ashen. They were much more frightened than Qin Lie and Gao Yu.

“Sister Qian, do you… know something about the Nether Battlefield and Soul Devouring Beast?” Qin Lie asked in a low voice.

After Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had arrived, he had moved to Tu Ze’s side so that he was now beside Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian.

He knew that Zhuo Qian was born in Dark Asura Hall and grew up there as well. Because of that, he presumed that Zhuo Qian should know a bit about the Nether Battlefield and Dark Asura Hall.

As expected, Zhuo Qian nodded lightly, worry evident on her face. “There are many scattered small dimensions around Spirit

Realm. In these small dimensions, there are many evil beings, powerful races, terrifying beasts, and even more terrifying monsters. Those dimensions are said to rely on the Spirit Realm to exist, so there are passages between them and the Spirit Realm. Those powerful and evil beings, the terrifying other races and beasts are always looking for an opportunity to invade Spirit Realm in order to acquire its vast lands.

"Nether Realm is a small dimension on the edge of Spirit Realm ,and there are evil beings active there. The Nether Battlefield is the passage between us and Nether Realm. To stop the evil beings of Nether Realm from coming through, Dark Asura Hall, Seven Fiends Valley, other black iron forces such as Dark Shadow Tower will send people into the Nether Battlefield to try to kill the evil beings that come through the Nether Battlefield into Spirit Realm.

"The Nether Battlefield is the passage that connects Nether Realm and Spirit Realm. In past centuries, black iron forces like Dark Asura Hall, Seven Fiends Valley, and Dark Shadow Tower have sent countless martial practitioners there. Inside the Nether Battlefield, the conflict between martial practitioners and evil existences have never stopped. Many martial practitioners have died...

"Soul Devouring Beasts are supposedly the spirit beasts of Nether Realm. It is a very frightening spirit beast that possesses an ability that allows it to rapidly evolve. As long it has enough souls to eat, the Soul Devouring Beast can quickly break through and enter new levels.

"Rank Three Soul Devouring Beasts possess the power to divide

their souls and form many soul fragments that can hunt everywhere. If one can destroy the main body and primary soul of the Rank Three Soul Devouring Beast, the Rank Three Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments would die as well, so Rank Three Soul Devouring Beasts are still easy to kill.

"Once the Soul Devouring Beast enters Rank Four, however, it has an even more frightening ability: its soul fragments do not die even if its main soul is destroyed! Rank Four Soul Devouring Beasts become just that much harder to defeat. Even if we kill its main soul and body, as long as even a single soul fragment escapes, the Soul Devouring Beast can still make a quick recovery by consuming more souls!

"Therefore, it is still relatively easy to kill Soul Devouring Beasts when they're Rank Three, but when they reach Rank Four, killing it becomes many times more difficult!"

Zhuo Qian's voice wasn't loud in the beginning. When she found that Liang Zhong had stopped and motioned for her to narrate the situation, her voice gradually became louder.

This was so everyone else could hear more clearly and gain a better understanding of the terrors of the Nether Battlefield and the Soul Devouring Beast.

"Rank Three Soul Devouring Beasts are not as strong and cannot directly take the souls of spirit beasts and martial practitioners. They can only split their soul to roam and absorb the souls of martial practitioners and soul beasts that have died," Liang Zhong added. "Once the Soul Devouring Beast breaks into rank four, it

can directly take the souls of low level martial practitioners and spirit beasts. If martial practitioners in the Refinement Realm, the Natal Opening Realm, and spirit beasts that are rank one or two do not cultivate special arts or have spirit artifacts that specifically protect the soul, they cannot resist at all and their soul would be instantly absorbed, resulting in immediate death!”

Once the words came out, everyone’s expressions became increasingly ugly as the terror became more evident.

“Let’s talk about it this way.” Liang Zhong inhaled deeply and said with a strange expression, “If we wait for this Soul Devouring Beast to become Rank Four, when it enters Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, Water Moon City, these three cities would become dead cities in only a few days. All the martial practitioners and ordinary citizens would die from having their souls eaten!”

Tu Ze, Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, and the others felt their bodies freeze in fear the moment the heard this.

—They finally recognized the true horror of the Soul Devouring Beast.

“Fortunately, this Soul Devouring Beast has not reached Rank Four yet,” Liang Zhong added. “Our mission this time is to kill this Soul Devouring Beast. Right now, it is in the depths of the stone forest…”

Liang Zhong gave a simple explanation and ordered the four factions, under Tu Ze, Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, and Yan Ziqian, to

cooperate to exterminate the spirit beasts in the surrounding area. The more they killed, they more pressure that they could take off the main group.

"We have set up a formation that can kill the Soul Devouring Beast where it is currently residing, but that caused the natural spirit energy of the world to become more abundant and has attracted many spirit beasts. This was something we did not expect. Now, we need to activate the formation as the Soul Devouring Beast is leveling up and use the formation to exterminate it when it is using all its power at the crucial moment of evolving into rank four."

"The spirit beasts that have gathered there have blocked all the roads. We cannot waste too much energy on cleaning out the spirit beasts. Due to this, we need your aid to lead the spirit beasts away or kill them. In short, before we act, we need the number of spirit beasts in that area to be greatly reduced to create an opportunity for us to enter. This is so we do not need to expend great amount of effort on the spirit beasts in order to reach the Soul Devouring Beast."

Liang Zhong outlined the situation clearly and then divided the labor among the four factions.

"Before entering, we do not have anything to do, so can we also go clear out some spirit beasts?" Qin Lie asked Liang Zhong.

Liang Zhong looked to Xie Jingxuan, and upon seeing her nod, he said, "You can."

So Qin Lie and Gao Yu went with Tu Ze's group to one of the places that the spirit beasts were gathering, following the martial practitioners of Dark Asura Hall for their extermination mission.

"Milady, should we help? If we help, the efficiency will be very high. Most of the young ones are in the Refinement Realm, and there aren't many in the Natal Opening Realm. It will be very difficult for them to complete this mission," Ban Hong asked.

Xie Jingxuan sighed lightly and said with a shake of her head, "I've been observing just now and have found that the Soul Devouring Beast can start its evolution at any moment. It may start in just a bit, no one can predict it. If you participate, you will waste spirit energy and physical power that cannot be recovered quickly."

"When I begin the formation, I need you to protect me with all you have, so you all must be at your best conditions. If you waste your energy on the spirit beasts and the Soul Devouring Beast starts to break through right then, your power will not have recovered when I open the formation which means I will not be able to successfully activate the formation. This would cause this mission to fail."

"Understood!" Ban Hong's was ashamed. He nodded and then ordered his subordinates, "Sit and meditate to maintain your best condition. Prepare to fight to the death at any moment!"

……

“Zhuo Qian, you’ve lived for a while at Dark Asura Hall, do you anything about who that woman is?” Tu Ze suddenly asked on the way to the depths of the stone forest.

Qin Lie, Kang Zhi, and the others also looked at her.

“I don’t know.” Zhuo Qian shook her head. “The Department of Internal Affairs is the most mysterious organization within Dark Asura Hall. Even within Dark Asura Hall, there are not many that know the internal situation. When I was little, my father would scare me by saying that people from the Department of Internal Affairs were coming to arrest me. Internal Affairs... it is a place that even the martial practitioners of Dark Asura Hall would fear if they heard it, so not many dare to investigate what goes on inside.”

“That woman is really beautiful.” Kang Zhi’s chubby face had a smile that asked for a beating. “If I can marry her, it’s worth it even if I die.”

“Yes, yes. If I can marry this woman for a day, then it’s worth it for a lifetime,” Han Feng agreed.

“You might all die, but you definitely cannot touch that woman...” Zhuo Qian looked coldly at them. “Every person that has a high position in the Department of Internal Affairs has gone through cruel and bloody torture! The people or inhuman evil beings that woman have killed are possibly more than you have ever seen!

“Even the most average General of the Department of Internal Affairs would have stayed in the Nether Battlefield for more than two years. That Ban Hong is a small leader of the department, and even he calls her milady… I don’t know how many years she’s been fighting on the Nether Battlefield with those evil beings.”

Zhuo Qian snorted and said, “The next time you see her, keep your gazes clean. Be careful so that you aren’t randomly killed! The people of Internal Affairs can kill Generals of Dark Asura Hall without even needing a reason, much less you who are from a subordinate force.”

Kang Zhi, Han Feng, Chu Peng, and the others shuddered at her words and finally regained clarity.

“Qin Lie, you should also be careful of that woman, do not offend her for any reason. No matter what kind of reason she has for needing your aid, you need to treat it seriously. Do not make her unhappy.” Zhuo Qian turned her head and continued seriously, “Even if she was in a bad mood and kills you without a reason, Nebula Pavilion has no way to get justice for you.”

Qin Lie’s face shuddered lightly and said bitterly, “I know.”

At the side, Gao Yu’s eyes showed terror upon hearing this as he thought he finally recognized the terrifying nature of the Department of Internal Affairs.

“Awoo!”

The howl of a spirit beast suddenly came from the stone forest in front of them. The sour smell unique to spirit beasts also came.

“Roar!”

“Aooo!”

The different howls sounded out one after another. The frantic howling of Rank Two spirit beasts caused the expressions of Qin Lie, Tu Ze, and the others to greatly change.

“Just listening to the howls, there are at least six Rank Two spirit beasts. Are you kidding me, h-how can we clean them out?” Kang Zhi paled dramatically.

Everyone hurriedly stopped, their hearts afraid as they looked in terror at the direction the howls came from.

Chapter 89: Luring Them Out

The six Rank Two spirit beasts were the equivalent of six Natal Opening Realm martial practitioners. This power alone wasn't something they could deal with.

Besides that, there were a lot of Rank One spirit beasts, and their combat strength posed just as much of a threat. Added to the fact that there were numerous Rank Ones, they could easily all be ripped to death.

For them, other than Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, who had reached the early stage of the Natal Opening Realm, the rest of them were only at the Refinement Realm.

Both Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had suffered quite the injury during their earlier battle against Yan Ziqian, and they still hadn't managed to recover yet...

Just how were they going to fight this?

"No! We're all just going to die if we rush in there and fight! No one will survive!" Kang Zhi shook his head repeatedly while squeezing out a bitter smile on his face. "Should we slow down for a bit? Wait until Big Brother Tu and Sister Qian recovers before taking this one step at a time?"

"The people of Dark Asura Hall's Department of Internal Affairs aren't easy to deal with. If they see us slack off instead of putting our lives on the line for them, we won't be able to come up with an

excuse. They can... punish us straight away or even kill us on the spot."

Zhuo Qian's expression was serious. "Running away is not an option, so we'll have to think of another way. Oh, right, they did mention earlier that it's okay to pull the spirit beasts away. They're only trying to go further in, and the spirit beast horde is blocking their way. As long as we are able to pull a portion of the horde away, we would have accomplished our mission."

"Yes, Zhuo Qian is right," Tu Ze interrupted. "Wanting to fight the spirit beasts head on is seeking our own deaths. We'll use our familiarity with the outer area of the stone forest, anger the spirit beasts, and attract them outside. That should be fine."

Qin Lie also nodded in agreement.

Soon enough, they finalized their plan, and with the aim to anger and bait the spirit beasts, they headed to an area the spirit beasts had gathered to.

An hour later, the group had arrived behind a large rock and stealthily poked out their heads.

It was a slightly open area of stone. Tens of spirit beasts had gathered at the spot, and most of them were Rank One spirit beasts. There was an Ice Soul Python, two Golden Crag Beasts, two Dragonhorn Rhinoceroses, and even a Golden Haired Ape in the mix. These six Rank Two spirit beasts were all situated at the fork deeper inside the stone forest.

The six Rank Two spirit beasts were all squatting neatly and appeared to be absorbing spirit energy using their unique spirit beasts ways.

Wisps of white fog entered and exited their nose and mouths, and the area they were in had slightly thicker nature spirit energy.

The six Rank Two spirit beasts had occupied the best positions, which was also the closest area to the deeper section of the stone forest.

The remaining tens of Rank One spirit beasts were spread out and stayed a far distance away from them. It appeared that they weren't allowed to get close.

"What a thick level of nature spirit energy." After Qin Lie had come, it took only one sniff for his expression to slightly shift, his eyes flashing with an odd light. He thought to himself, "The Spirit Gathering Boards! The world's spirit energy here has been gathered by the Spirit Gathering Boards! Xie Jingxuan's specially arranged formation used to purify the Soul Devouring Beast must have Spirit Gathering Boards hidden inside it, and it was also these Spirit Gathering Boards that so much of the world's spirit energy has been gathered around this area."

He immediately understood what happened.

"Let's go!" Tu Ze yelled in a soft tone.

“Attack!” the group yelled in unison.

“Swish Swish Swoosh! Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh! Zzt Zzt Zzt!”

For a time, rays of vivid rainbow-like colors flew over from their direction.

There were crimson flames, faint blue lightning, cold gray fog, fluttering blades of wind, bright-silver nebula balls, brown-yellow rainbow beams...

They were all released from the spirit artifacts they held in their hands, focusing them into rays of bright and vivid multi-colored lights that shot straight at the center of the spirit beast horde.

“Aoo!”

The spirit beasts’ howls abruptly exploded outwards, and in pain, all of the spirit beasts who were using the world’s spirit energy to cultivate had turned mad.

The eyes of those bloodthirsty and cruel beast searched in all four directions, and they immediately locked down Tu Ze and Qin Lie’s loudly shrieking group. Immediately, the spirit beasts howled out in anger and rushed into action.

The six Rank Two spirit beasts were also attacked by the storm-

like barrage. The nebula light balls and wind blades from Tu Ze's longblade and Zhuo Qian's Dragon Bone Whip showed off their awesome power and drew bloody wounds on all three spirit beasts, angering them completely.

The irritated spirit beast horde rushed out and directly charged towards the group, and a fierce and brutal atmosphere akin to a dark cloud bore down upon them.

"Run!"

Kang Zhi screeched out. The actions of his fat body were both swift and agile, and he was the first to run out.

Han Feng, Chu Peng and the rest were ready to do the same long ago, and the moment they saw him charged forward, they too followed closely behind him, afraid to be left behind.

"Go!"

Tu Ze shouted aloud and urged both Gao Yu and Qin Lie to quickly escape. Both Zhuo Qian and him held their spirit artifacts in hand and looked to stay at the furthest end to cut off any pursuers.

When he saw the tens of spirit beasts rushing towards them, Qin Lie was also frightened by the parade as he hurriedly called after Gao Yu with a slight change in expression, "Let's go!"

Gao Yu nodded and retreated along with Qin Lie, shoulder by shoulder, back the way they came. They purposely picked crooked small trails to escape to.

Once Gao Yu and Qin Lie had left, Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian did not dare to stay too long either. Once they had let loose a few more wind blades and nebula beams and blasted the spirit beasts at random, they also bolted and ran like hell.

Amidst the stone hills that were like a forest of swords, Xie Jingxuan had abandoned their Profound Nether Beasts and stood at the pinnacle of the hills.

This particular stone hill was tens of meters high, and it allowed them to clearly see from afar with a bird's-eye view. Their realms were rather high, and their eyesights were impeccable. It took them a single glance to notice the huge commotion Qin Lie and Tu Ze had created, watching them speedily retreat while the spirit beasts chased madly after them until they slowly left the gathering point.

"I suppose these kids are pretty smart." Liang Zhong smiled and nodded his head. "If they were to fight the spirit beast horde head on, it's highly probable that none of them will survive. I suppose they have achieved our demands now that they have lured the spirit beast horde away. Hmm, not bad; I may have underestimated them."

"Look over there." Xie Jingxuan pointed in another direction. "The group from Crimson Flame Association are a bunch of simpletons. They won't use their brains unless they suffer some

real losses.”

Liang Zhong looked in direction she was pointing in with an odd expression as he dumbfoundedly said, “This Xiong Ba is seriously just like his father and grandfather!”

From their point of view, they could vaguely see that Crimson Flame Association’s Xiong Ba and his men had charged straight into the center of the spirit beast horde and were caught in a fierce battle.

Although the spirit beasts they were fighting weren’t as fearsome as the ones Qin Lie’s group had encountered, there were still four Rank Two spirit beasts and fifty more Rank Ones.

Xiong Ba and Crimson Flame Association were obviously at a disadvantage fighting the fearsome beasts alone, and if they didn’t grow a brain soon and retreat, it wouldn’t be long before they experienced casualties.

“They’re a bit stupid,” Xie Jingxuan commented with a frown.

Liang Zhong nodded his head and let out a sigh. “These guys are definitely going to eat some big losses. Crimson Flame Association’s decision to let Xiong Ba lead the group was a clear lapse in judgment.”

“Shattered Ice Manor and Water Moon Sect’s plans were the same as Nebula Pavilion’s. They were all smart enough not to fight

the spirit beasts head on.” After a while, Yan Ziqian and Na Nuo began to make their move, and watching the commotion from afar, Xie Jingxuan nodded slightly. “That Na Nuo is pretty good. Out of the four leaders, she is the strongest, and she also takes great care of her sisters…”

She could see very far, and she could see that, although Yan Ziqian’s plan was the same as Na Nu — both were baiting the spirit beasts to leave their positions — but when they put their plan into action, there were some minor differences in terms of minute detail between the two.

After Yan Ziqian and the others had angered the spirit beasts, Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai left first without a care for anyone else. They were obviously selfish people.

Na Nuo was different. Just like Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, she had taken the initiative to stay at the very end and waited until her lower realm sisters had made it out before she escaped herself.

The actions of all four groups — Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Flame Association, Shattered Ice Manor and Water Moon Sect — were seen in their entirety by Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong. The two had also formed a rough opinion on the behavior and character of those in the four groups.

After watching for a while, both of them placed their attention onto Nebula Pavilion’s group, specifically Qin Lie and Gao Yu.

“This Gao Yu kid cultivates a rather special spirit art, and his

character is also incredibly dark and ruthless. He hides a viciousness in his bones." Liang measured his words for a while. "But this kid is antisocial and seems to enjoy being a loner. He isn't good at communicating and his teamwork can use a little work."

Seeing that Xie Jingxuan didn't say anything, Liang Zhong frowned slightly and pondered, "As for that Qin Lie kid, I can't exactly see through him..."

"Oh?" Xie Jingxuan turned his head around, seemingly wanting him to continue.

"Along the way, Qin Lie had been very quiet, giving the impression that he is a gentle and quiet kid. We've seen him a few times at Li's Shop, and his behavior was pretty normal. He speaks tactfully and does things quite well. He feels just like the guy next door, and at first glance, there's nothing special about him..."

After a pause, Liang Zhong then said, "However, when he fights with another person, he suddenly turns incredibly fierce and violent, like a beast that had been suppressed for a long time was suddenly unleashed onto the world. He does not show any mercy, and his attacks are like a violent storm. Once he entered combat, it's as if he has transformed into a completely different person, as if he had transformed into a monster and a fiend; it is completely different from his usual behavior. This is incredibly strange."

"Perhaps he reveals his true self when he fights. Perhaps this is his true nature. Perhaps the him in daily life is just a disguise..."

Xie Jingxuan suddenly spoke out, and her words both surprised and confused Liang Zhong. Just as Liang Zhong was about to ask, she continued saying, “I’ve talked with Tu Mo before. I heard from Tu Mo that this Qin Lie came from the vassal force called the Ling Family under Nebula Pavilion. He and his grandfather came to the Ling Family together. Apparently, he forgot everything from over ten years ago. It’s as if that part of his memories was completely missing.”

At this point, she frowned for a bit before continuing, “More often than not, how people express themselves during combat is their truest self. That is why the Qin Lie who is violent, savage, and brutal in battle may be the true Qin Lie; that could be the character he had developed during those past ten years.”

Liang Zhong looked surprised. “In that case, this Qin Lie is seriously not simple. I dare say that such a violent, savage, and brutal fellow cannot possibly come from a normal family.”

“Mn.” Xie Jingxuan nodded. “Unfortunately, he can no longer remember the past, or we could otherwise clear our doubts. However, all I hope right now is that during the moment we need him, he will be able to summon a bolt of lightning from the Ninth Heaven just like last time. Then he’ll be able to help us. Otherwise, no matter what background he might have, he is of no value to us at all.”

“True.”

Chapter 90: Variant Spirit Beast

“Poof!”

The Ice Soul Python fired a bright silver ball of ice from its mouth. While the ball of ice was spinning, a cold chill spread out in every direction before destroying the stone pillar Qin Lie was behind. There was actually the shocking sound of thunder.

The Rank Two Ice Soul Python was about six or seven meters long and as wide as a human’s waist. Its beastly eyes glittered with brutality as it swiftly charged at him.

Qin Lie suddenly turned around and glanced at where the ball of ice had exploded. His eyes shone with a strange light.

“Let’s go! What are you waiting for?” Gao Yu halted and urged him to leave quickly, his expression urgent.

At this moment, the escaping group slowly spread out. Tu Ze and Kang Zhi went one way whereas Zhuo Qian, Han Feng, and Chu Peng went the other. However, they were all still moving to the outer edge of the stone forest; it was just that they split up halfway for convenience’s sake.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu had stuck together. Close behind them was the Ice Soul Python and a dozen-odd snake and python type Rank One spirit beasts.

Because these Rank One spirit beasts were slightly slower, after a time of pursuit they were gradually left behind and the Ice Soul Python were the only one still pursuing.

Both Qin Lie and Gao Yu would attack and provoke the Ice Soul Python from time to time to prevent it from heading back, aggravating it so it wouldn't stop chasing them.

"Fwoosh!"

The silver ball of ice was crystalline bright and about the size of a fist. Once again it flew over with a biting chill.

Qin Lie did not run away. Instead, his eyes were bright as he closely watched the clump of faint blue inside the ball of ice. From inside it he could feel... a surge of thunder energy!

The Ice Soul Python was an ice type spirit beast. Its body was cold and chilly, and its attacks usually consisted of blades of ice and dregs of ice. It relied on cold poison to hurt people.

However, this Ice Soul Python seemed to be slightly different. Its ball of ice contained a thunderous wave, and after it landed, it also resulted in a roar of thunder and powerful explosion...

This attracted Qin Lie's attention.

Seeing that another ball of ice was headed in his direction, Qin Lie held his breath and channeled Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

Electric currents covered his his entire body, and there was thunder faintly roaring from inside his body.

The terribly cold ball of ice headed straight for Qin Lie's chest. A chill that seeped into his bones rushed at him, causing Qin Lie's entire body to turn rigid, and even his blood felt like it had frozen over.

"As expected of a Rank Two spirit beast; this chilliness is unbelievable!" Qin Lie's face turned slightly as he continued to channel Heavenly Thunder Eradication, and right before the ball of ice was about to hit him, he suddenly stuck out his finger and pointed.

A thumb-sized light blue lightning abruptly shot out of his fingertips and struck the ball of ice perfectly.

"Boooom!"

The silver ball abruptly exploded, and the thunder energy stored inside it exploded as well, causing dregs of ice to shoot out everywhere.

"Pew! Pew!"

Some ice splattered against Qin Lie's body, and a chilly flow spread out along with them, causing his teeth to chatter like crazy and his muscles to feel like they had frozen over.

“Thunder! There is thunder energy inside the balls of ice!” Qin Lie exclaimed.

The ball of ice forming inside the Ice Soul Python’s mouth had a translucent, icy and crystalline shell. However, once it shattered, the thunder energy inside would immediately explode outwards.

The explosive thunder energy was actually even stronger than the icy power itself. It seemed that this was the balls of ice’s true power and the Ice Soul Python’s key to killing people.

“Qin Lie, what are you doing?” Gao Yu returned from the front and stood beside Qin Lie.

At this moment, the Ice Soul Python twisted its body and raised its head high. It had also made its way in front Qin Lie, and cruelty and malice leaked out of its eerie green eyes.

“This Ice Soul Python is a bit special. The balls of ice it spits out contains the power of thunder!” Qin Lie was excited. “In that case, its beast core definitely contains the power of thunder! Perhaps there are thunder type spirit materials inside its body. I’m going to kill this Ice Soul Python!”

“A variant spirit beast?” Gao Yu looked startled for a moment before he yelled out, “A variant spirit beast is harder to deal with than a normal spirit beast, and this is a Rank Two Ice Soul Python no less… it’ll be very hard for the two of us to take it down!”

“Let’s give it a try!” Qin Lie’s expression was filled with eagerness. “Since the two of us are only at the Refinement Realm, five of those six Rank Two spirit beasts have gone to pursue Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian, and there was only one Ice Soul Python that chased us down. It will be slightly difficult to take down this Ice Soul Python even if we work together, but it is not without hope, especially when it’s an Ice Soul Python that has cultivated both ice and thunder!”

“Alright then, let’s give it a try!” After a few seconds of ponderment, Gao Yu’s expression too shook and showed excitement. “Do you want to be the main attacker or me?”

“I’ll be it; you attack from the sides!”

Qin Lie sucked in a deep breath and took out the wooden sculpture. Channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, the cracking sound of electricity came from inside the wooden sculpture as fine streaks of electricity formed on top of the sculpture’s head.

“Boom Boom!”

Explosive sounds of thunder resounded from inside his bones, and as if the blood and cells throughout his entire body were being activated. With the wooden sculpture in his hand, Qin Lie suddenly attacked the Ice Soul Python head on.

The Ice Soul Python let out a strange cry, opened its stinking mouth, and formed yet another silver ball of ice. The ball of ice,

overflowing with chilliness and refracting a glaring icy light, whirled at him.

Qin Lie did not dodge. Waving the wooden sculpture at the ball of ice, the tightly woven electric net formed by the wooden sculpture shrank.

Each strand of lightning joined into a single beam and transformed into a thunderbolt the size of an arm, and it abruptly collided with the ball of ice above.

“Boom!”

The ball of ice suddenly exploded as pieces of ice flew at all direction. The thunderous energy inside exploded, and the scalding thunder wave engulfed Qin Lie.

“Boom Boom Boom!”

The sounds of thunder resounded from Qin Lie’s body. It was the thunder’s explosive energy inside the ball of ice flowing out as the ball exploded.

If Gao Yu was the main attacker, even if he knew from that the ball of ice was special, the thunder energy would still blast into him after he cracked the icy thunder ball’s shell.

Gao Yu, who was in the same realm as Qin Lie, would definitely be hurt or even severely injured if that explosive thunder energy

were to flow into his body. He would lose the ability to fight again.

However, Qin Lie had been cultivating the power of thunder and lightning for many years, and his body could withstand the invasion of thunder energy from the Ninth Heaven. His body had long been tempered to the peak of sturdiness, and he became a monster who could withstand being bombed with most types of thunder and lightning energy. That was why the explosive thunder energy could not even scratch him.

Quite the opposite, after the thunder exploded inside his body and the surges of slightly chilled thunder energy seeped in, it disappeared as he absorbed it all with his flesh and bones.

A refreshing and comfortable feeling invigorated him instead. He could obviously feel the increase of thunder energy inside his body.

He immediately realized that his judgment was correct. He was the best candidate to deal with this specific Ice Soul Python that would normally be deadly to the average martial practitioner!

“Fwoosh Fwoosh!”

Another icy thunder ball was blasted at his head. The Ice Soul Python gave a strange howl and actually looked to wrap Qin Lie with its pail-sized but nimbly twisting body.

“Gao Yu! Don’t let it wrap around me!” Qin Lie yelled out loudly as he withdrew, and with the wave of a hand, he had formed yet

another lightning and stabbed the icy thunder ball with immaculate accuracy.

When the icy thunder ball exploded, he immediately stopped retreating; instead, he moved forward to take on the second wave of thunder.

Explosions of thunder energy were accompanied by the booms of thunder. Rampant thunder energy surged into his body before it vanished in silence along with the extinguishing sound of thunder.

“Thunder and lightning. They may often be mentioned together, but they are in fact two different kinds of energy. Thunder is explosive sound, whereas lightning is a blaze of beams of electricity. The two energies are actually different, but they are often added to each other and can be found deep inside the nine heavens. When I cultivated Heavenly Thunder Eradication in the past, I have attracted more lightning than thunder energy, so my body’s ability to accommodate the violent energy of thunder seemed to be slightly lacking...”

Sensing the power of thunder inside his body, he came to a careful understanding as his recognition of Heavenly Thunder Eradication became clearer and clearer.

Heavenly Thunder Eradication cultivated both thunder and lightning, combining the two most dominating and violent energies in the world into one. With lightning complementing the power of thunder and thunder complementing the power of lightning, it blended both energies together to form a terrifyingly powerful attack.

However, his cultivation of Heavenly Thunder Eradication for the past few years was the result of the gathered energy during a lightning storm. They consisted of mostly lightning energy, and their thunder energy was obviously much weaker.

The strange formation inside Ling Town's Herb Mountain could attract and gather lightning from the sky, then split and weaken it before conducting the energy into his body to temper his tendons, flesh, and blood.

The wild and explosive power of thunder would most likely cause a terrifying explosion the moment it landed, and this kind of power was... very hard to control and weaken.

Therefore, his cultivation of Heavenly Thunder Eradication was probably slanted towards the attraction and gathering of lightning energy and a lot less in regards to thunder.

Later on, when he detached himself from the shackles of Herb Mountain and went to train on his own inside the Arctic Mountain Range without relying on the strange formation inside Herb Mountain, his body was directly exposed to the sky and thus caused both thunder and lightning to fall on his body. That was how his body contained a portion of thunder energy.

However, compared to lightning energy, the thunder energy stored inside his body's acupoints, tendons, and bones were far, far weaker.

This caused him to use mostly lightning to attack when he fought with other people because he didn't have much thunder energy stored inside his body. This was also why his attacks were all comprised light blue lightning without the complementary violent and destructive power of thunder. Due to this factor, he was unable to unleash the true abilities of Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

"So that is how it is. I get it now."

Another icy thunder ball exploded, and another wave of thunder energy flooded him. The rampant and explosive thunder sank into his body, entering his acupoints, tendons, and bones. He quietly felt for the changes inside his body and gradually came to an understanding; he understood how he could unleash the true power of Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

"Thunder and lightning. Thunder and lightning. Thunder, and lightning!" The palms on his two hands pressed together into one. Blazing lightning interconnected at the center of his palms, and sounds of violent thunder roared out from inside his hands.

"Thunder Lightning Ball!"

A faint blue electrical ball formed from lightning slowly appeared at the center of his palm. The outer shell of the ball sparked with lightning, and there was roaring thunder alongside it within.

The fist-sized Thunder Lightning Ball gradually came into form. The eye-piercing faint blue electrical light and explosive sounds of

thunder sent shudders into people's hearts.

Just like the icy thunder ball, its external shell was formed into a ball shape by lightning, and its interior contained the wild explosive energy of thunder!

"Boom!"

The Thunder Lightning Ball was thrown out. Quick as lightning like a bolt of electrical light, it instantly launched at the Ice Soul Python's head. Immediately after, lightning shot out and thunder energy exploded outwards.

The head of the Ice Soul Python was blasted bloody by the explosive thunder energy, and a hole pooling with blood and brain matter suddenly appeared.

The Rank Two spirit beast was actually blown up in one shot after the Thunder Lightning Ball made direct contact with its head.

Chapter 91: Scurry

The Ice Soul Python's head exploded. Bloody fluid and brain matter leaked out along with the smell of burnt flesh. The stench on the variant python's body was just offensive to the extreme.

The six-to seven-meter Ice Soul Python had ring-shaped patterns on its body, and the black and white patterns looked quite beautiful.

Gao Yu walked forward as his dark eyes focused on those stripes. Suddenly, he slowly raised his head as if watching something rising into the air.

Qin Lie followed his gaze but did not see anything, so with doubt, he asked, "What are you looking at?"

"A departing soul." Gao Yu's eyes flashed with an eerie light. The Ogre-faced Ring in his hand was also flashing. "The Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragment did not come over. There are no black clouds on the sky, and this soul that had departed from the Ice Soul Python corpse is... slowly fading into nothingness. It has nearly merged completely with the world."

Shock bloomed in Qin Lie's heart as he subconsciously tried to sense it with a frown...

He closed his eyes, let out his mind energy, and looked about with his mind consciousness.

Vaguely, he could sense a very thin gaseous form being swept away, little by little, as if it was blown by the wind.

From the thin gas form, he could sense many complex waves. They were like many broken pictures and the soul body's unique memories...

"I know it's really hard for you to understand this and a soul body isn't something that can be detected by regular people, but souls... definitely exist." Gao Yu didn't look at Qin Lie but continued staring towards the sky. "Both because the spirit art I cultivate is special and because the Ogre-faced Ring is a little rare, I was able to see them. It's natural that other people are unable to sense them."

"But according to what I've heard, when the souls of some powerful spirit beasts and high level martial practitioners had reached a certain level of strength, even if their body died, their souls would remain immortal and would not vanish into the world. The souls of those high level existences could exist independently despite losing a body, and they can look for a new body and be reborn again!" Gao Yu looked on dreamily. "I've heard all of this from the Ogre-faced Ring, so I didn't know if it's true or not..."

"It's all true," Qin Lie suddenly interrupted.

Gao Yu appeared surprised as he looked to Qin Lie and asked in confusion, "How do you know if it's real or not?"

“These words… someone had told me about it in the past.” Qin Shan’s face appeared in Qin Lie’s head. “Moreover, I also was able to sense… just a little of that Ice Soul Python’s soul. I can feel it dissipating little by little, just like a light smoke being blown apart by the wind.”

Gao Yu’s expression turned slightly. “How can you detect them? I was only able to vaguely see them by relying on my spirit art and Ogre-faced Ring, so how can you see them?”

He really was quite shocked. During the time he had been operating with Discipline Hall’s martial practitioners outside of Icestone City, he had fought with many spirit beasts and killed quite a few of them. He had seen the Soul Devouring Beast’s soul fragments in action before.

And yet, he was the only one who was able to detect the soul’s actions after they died. Even if he explained it to Discipline Hall’s martial practitioners, they were unwilling to believe him.

Much less detect the dissipation process of the souls.

Qin Lie was the only other person who was able to detect the spirit beast’s soul dissipating — and this great surprised Gao Yu.

“I’m not too sure myself. At any rate, I can feel them, but I do not see them with my eyes… but feel them with my soul,” Qin Lie explained.

“Sense them with your soul?” Shock flowed out of Gao Yu’s eyes. “In that case, your soul must be a lot stronger than normal people’s! Only martial practitioners with incredibly powerful souls are able to sense the actions of a soul body. Th-this is also the explanation given by the one inside my ring!”

When Gao Yu looked at Qin Lie once more, his gaze suddenly turned strange. “You bastard, it looks like you hide quite a few secrets in you. I didn’t imagine your soul to be this powerful!”

“A powerful soul? Hm, I guess you’re right.”

Qin Lie himself was quietly surprised. The reason he had tempered his mind energy for the past two years was to slowly strengthen his soul. Moreover, from the moment he had memories, he could already clearly feel the existence of mind energy.

It was as if ten years ago he had already worked hard to cultivate his mind, and that was why his soul was much stronger than a normal person’s.

“Your spirit skill just now was pretty powerful too. That Thunder Lightning Ball was full of power, and it blew that Ice Soul Python’s head to bits instantly. Not many spirit artifacts can achieve such explosive power.” Gao Yu was obviously a little envious, and he walked until he was beside the Ice Soul Python’s corpse and said, “It looks like you’ve found a suitable spirit skill for yourself inside the Scripture Tower. That ball formed from

thunder and lightning... is really powerful."

"Spirit skill?" Qin Lie was dumbfounded by his words, and after a thought, he nodded and smiled, "That's right, that Thunder Lightning Ball is the spirit skill I've recently mastered."

"Let's check out the goods." Gao Yu's face was full of excitement as he took out a dagger and began digging into the Ice Soul Python's bloody brain.

Before long, he dug out an egg-sized silver-white crystal. The crystal was hexagonal in shape and icy-cold to touch. A silver-white fog surrounded it.

"This is the Ice Soul Python's beast core. Since this beast is a variant, its beast core should be a bit odd as well." When Gao Yu touched it, his fingers were immediately covered in ice. "So cold! This beast core is ridiculously cold. It should be very suitable for those Shattered Ice Manor bastards, but not really that useful for us."

"Let me have a look."

Qin Lie walked forward and pointed his fingers at the hexagonal crystal. A bitter cold energy immediately invaded and turned his finger rigid. Even his body had shuddered once.

"Boooom!"

However, a thunderous sound could be heard from inside the core. Since he cultivated Heavenly Thunder Eradication, he could clearly sense it.

“This spirit core may be useful for me, so I’ll be taking this.” He didn’t bother with pleasantries, and with a chuckle, Qin Lie put the crystal into his waist bag right before Gao Yu’s eyes. Then he said, “Let’s melt the Ice Soul Python and have a look. Whatever’s left should all be pretty good spirit materials. Let’s see what it has.”

“Okay.”

Gao Yu took out Nebula Pavilion’s acid water specially made to melt spirit beasts and poured it on top of the Ice Soul Python’s body. Without an energy field to protect its body, under the acid water’s powerful acidic properties, the Ice Soul Python’s body rapidly melted. Very soon there was a pool of blood on the stone floor, and it was even spreading rapidly.

Within minutes, the flesh of the Ice Soul Python had melted completely. What was left was its skin, bones, sharp and poisonous teeth, and a pair of eyes.

Qin Lie examined them closely for a while and gave special attention to the pair of eyes. He rubbed his hands on the pair of eyes and suddenly picked one of them. “This eye has thunder waves inside it, so it should be a thunder type spirit material. I’ll save the pleasantries. And yeah, the rest of the spirit materials are yours.”

“Oh.” Gao Yu packed up the rest of the python skin, bone, poisonous fang and the other eye, “These spirit materials are proof that we’ve hunted an Ice Soul Python. When we get back to the pavilion, we can turn them in for contribution points.”

“It shouldn’t be too hard to kill another Rank Two spirit beast if we combine our strength.” Qin Lie suddenly suggested after rubbing his chin and giving it some thought, “Do you want to continue hunting?”

“No problem.” Gao Yu nodded.

“Let’s go! Let’s go and look for the other Rank Two spirit beasts!” Qin Lie said spiritedly.

And so, the duo began to act and swiftly sweep the outer edge of the stone forest, looking for the other Rank Two spirit beasts.

At this moment, Shattered Ice Manor’s Yan Ziqian and Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo were using the same method of angering the spirit beast horde and pulling them towards the outer edge of the stone forest while running. Even Crimson Flame Association’s Xiong Ba had learned his lesson after two of his brothers were killed. They no longer dared to fight the spirit beast horde to the death and were running wherever they could with the spirit beast horde behind them.

Therefore, there were many spirit beast activities at the outer layer of the stone forest. When the people from Shattered Ice

Manor, Nebula Pavilion, Crimson Flame Association, and Water Moon Sect escaped, they normally picked a random direction in panic, and quite often they would even run into each other.

But everyone understood the current situation, and after they ran into each other, they simply nodded before splitting up again hurriedly.

Even when Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and Yan Ziqian ran into each other, they did not dare to fight each other. They only left behind a few harsh words before continuing to escape.

—There was a spirit beast horde pursuing every group, and they all had a couple of Rank Two spirit beasts roaring in mad rage.

In the meantime, if the four groups realized that the number of spirit beasts behind them had decreased and that there were only one or two Rank Two spirit beasts, then they would halt their steps and counterattack.

Of course, there were also people who were chased into a dead end by the spirit beast horde and had no choice but to fight the spirit beasts' rush directly... in this case, those martial practitioners often had to pay a heavy price.

Water Moon Sect's Na Nuo was one of the unfortunate ones to have accidentally run into a dead end, and as a result, two girls were torn apart and eaten alive by the spirit beasts. Some of them had also suffered various levels of injuries as well.

Yan Ziqian's group was also unlucky to be pincered by two different hordes. As a result, three men died on the spot, and even Yan Qingsong's left arm was bitten off.

On the other hand, after their initial misfortune, Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba sailed smoothly and did not suffer any casualties.

Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian had also been pincered by spirit beast hordes before, but they would often risk even death to save their companions, suffering injuries or even having a few pieces of flesh bitten off in order to save their friends.

Therefore, while everyone in Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's group were covered in blood and suffered a considerable amount of injuries, not a single one of them had died.

Out of all four sides, Qin Lie and Gao Yu were the odd ones out. They acted together, and they could often find a lone spirit beast and attack first.

Under their combined strength, including the Ice Soul Python, they had actually killed three Rank Two spirit beasts and sixteen Rank One spirit beasts.

All of these had fallen under Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong's eyes as they were watching them from above. Because of this, they paid extra attention to Qin Lie and Gao Yu.

“Those two kids are way too sensitive towards the spirit beasts’ actions.” Standing on top of the hill, Liang Zhong watched Qin Lie and Gao Yu’s movements from afar. “Their sense of smell is exceptional, and more often than not, they would discover a spirit beast horde while it was still far away and avoid them ahead of time. And because of this, they haven’t run into a spirit beast horde yet, instead always finding a lone spirit beast to attack. Therefore, their abilities are impressive.”

“It’s because of Qin Lie.” Xie Jingxuan’s eyes fell onto Qin Lie from far, far away. “He is able to sense the spirit beast horde approaching before getting out of the way with Gao Yu very early on. Therefore, they always avoid the powerful spirit beast horde and always keep themselves safe.”

“You mean it wasn’t Gao Yu?” Liang Zhong was surprised. “Gao Yu is sharp enough to detect the existence of a soul body. It wasn’t actually him?”

“It’s Qin Lie,” Xie Jingxuan said with certainty.

Liang Zhong did not understand and was confused.

Just when Xie Jingxuan was about to explain, she suddenly saw a change from the black clouds deep inside the stone forest. She saw that the black clumps of Soul Devouring Beast soul fragments were actually writhing constantly like a sea of clouds as they suddenly dived towards the ground.

It was as if there was a powerful suction force pulling from under

the soul fragments, sucking them all down.

"It has begun!" Her expression turned slightly as she quickly said, "We'll rush in there now!"

Liang Zhong's expression was extremely serious, and he quickly flew down to the ground and prepared to act with Dark Asura Hall's Ban Hong and others.

"Uncle Zhong, you should contact all four sides first and allow them to enter deeper into the stone forest. There is actually no spirit beast horde gathered inside that area, so it has changed from a danger zone to a slightly safer region. Also, bring Qin Lie and Gao Yu with you. These two people... might actually be useful," Xie Jingxuan instructed quickly.

"Understood. I'm heading off."

Chapter 92: Unstoppable

“Do you want the Silver Flame Spider’s eyes?”

“No, give me the legs, I might be able to use them.”

“Okay, I want the spider silk they spit out. It’s very tensile and pretty good spirit material.”

“Give me the teeth.”

“Mn.”

Qin Lie and Gao Yu were crouched beside the Silver Flame Spider that had been dissolved and were going through the spirit materials to decide how to split them up.

The two quickly divided up the Rank Two Silver Flame Spider.

The cloth pouch on Qin Lie’s waist was bulging full of spirit materials. It was the same with Gao Yu. His pouch was also stuffed full.

Several Silver Flame Spider feet were still on the ground. No matter how, the two were unable to put them away.

“If we had a spatial ring, we wouldn’t have to waste any spirit materials, and it would be more convenient to carry everything.”

Qin Lie looked at the jade-like spider feet and said with regret, “But we can’t do anything about it currently.The spirit materials are pretty good, but we can’t take them with us.”

“In all of Icestone City, only three people have spatial rings, we don’t even need to think about it.” Gao Yu struck where it hurt.

“If you two can even enter Dark Asura Hall someday and obtain a high-ranking position, then you can obtain a spatial ring.” Liang Zhong’s voice suddenly sounded out. When his voice landed, the Profound Nether Beast arrived. “Both of you, do not waste my time right now, come up here. We need to proceed inside.”

On the Profound Nether Beast, Liang Zhong was wearing dark brown armor. His chest, arms, legs, and even neck were all covered in that kind of hard brown armor. The armor did not seem like metal but some kind of special wood that even had dense wood grains on its surface.

The armor that covered more than half of his body added an intimidating presence to Liang Zhong.

“Uncle Zhong, your armor looks really good,” Qin Lie praised.

“Pleasing to look at?” Liang Zhong’s expression was strange. “This Hempwood Armor is a type of spirit artifact and made by Great Master Lu of Dark Asura Hall. This spirit armor isn’t just good to look at, its defense is also pretty good. Even if I stand here without moving, the two of you would not be able to break through it even if both of you attacked at full power, do you believe

it?”

“I don’t believe it.” Gao Yu shook his head.

“Come up and try.” Liang Zhong beckoned with a hand and motioned for the two to sit on the Profound Nether Beast. “We are charging into the depths of the stone forest, quick!”

Qin Lie and Gao Yu exchanged a look. They did not dawdle and sat onto the Profound Nether Beast.

The Profound Nether Beast of the Nether Battlefield was a size larger than even the most ferocious horse. It was not a squeeze for three people to sit on it together.

Because the Profound Nether Beast was large enough, Gao Yu sat behind Liang Zhong and Qin Lie was behind Gao Yu. There was space between them so that their chests and backs were not pressed together which meant there was a great deal of free space.

“Hempwood Armor... let me try.” Gao Yu reached out and pressed on the dark brown armor plate on Liang Zhong’s back. Spirit energy suddenly flooded out like a sword and stabbed in!

“Bang!”

The spirit energy seemed to have stabbed onto a thick rubber ball. It did not manage to break through the armor but violently bounced back and shook Gao Yu, rocking him back and forth.

His dark face showed how astounded he became. “This Hempwood Armor is actually so strong that I cannot break through. Qin Lie, how about you try?”

“Okay!” Qin Lie was also interested. Seeing Gao Yu turn his body to the side, he also gathered his power.

A ball of light blue lightning slowly grew in the center of his palm. A hazy blue Thunder Lightning Ball slowly formed, and a violent and domineering lightning ripple slowly appeared.

“Change spots, change spots first!” Seeing this, Gao Yu’s face shook. He hurriedly got Liang Zhong to slow the Profound Nether Beast down and he moved from in front of Qin Lie to behind him.

He knew the power of the Thunder Lightning Ball was astounding.

“Boom!”

Just as Gao Yu moved away, that Thunder Lightning Ball exploded behind Liang Zhong’s back. Liang Zhong faltered due to the explosion and almost fell off the Profound Nether Beast.

Yet, while his back was burnt black, that Hempwood Armor still did not have any holes from the explosion.

But Gao Yu had been hit by the Thunder Lightning Ball even after he had moved behind Qin Lie and was propelled off the beast.

“Such a wondrous Hempwood Armor! This armor is really powerful. Is this armor impenetrable?” Qin Lie did not notice that Gao Yu had been blown away and shouted with a surprised expression.

“Wait for me!” Gao Yu suddenly shouted.

Liang Zhong slowed the Profound Nether Beast down. When Gao Yu climbed back up again, Liang Zhong turned and looked at Qin Lie, saying, “Kid, you are vicious. If this Hempwood Armor wasn’t strong enough, if I wasn’t... wasn’t prepared beforehand, I would definitely have suffered!”

Glaring at Qin Lie, he snorted, “It isn’t that the Hempwood Armor is powerful but that you kids are too weak. You are just in the Refinement Realm, and your spirit energy hasn’t even been refined, so the power is limited. If the two of you had broken into the Natal Opening Realm, the Hempwood Armor might not be able to protect my body entirely. If you break into the Manifestation Realm, naturally, I will not dare to allow you two to attack without preparing beforehand.”

“In Dark Asura Hall, the Hempwood Armor is only slightly precious and was just forged by Great Master Lu. The ‘Blackscale Armor’ that Miss wears is truly a high-level spirit armor and is much more powerful than my Hempwood Armor. You will see later.”

Liang Zhong gave a simple explanation. The Profound Nether Beast suddenly accelerated and flashed deeper into the stone forest like a wisp of smoke.

Along the way, Qin Lie and Gao Yu saw Na Nuo and the others from Water Moon Sect and Xiong Ba and the others from Crimson Flame Association that were also travelling deeper into the stone forest.

Qin Lie noticed that, then discovered that there were two less females with Na Nuo. Na Nuo and the other young women had grave expressions. No one was smiling as though they had experienced a tragic event.

“Their luck was not as good as you two. You two weren’t just unharmed, you also killed spirit beasts.” Liang Zhong sighed lightly. “Two from Water Moon Sect died, two from Crimson Flame Association have died, and there are also three from Shattered Ice Manor that have died. Only Nebula Pavilion has gotten away with only heavy injuries and no deaths…”

Qin Lie and Gao Yu’s expressions became grave as they heard him speak and said no more.

They quickly passed the stone peaks as the Profound Nether Beasts rushed forward. Soon enough, the squeals of horses came from up ahead.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu focused their attention to the front and found

that there were ten variant unicorns up ahead. The unicorns were a hybrid between fierce horses and Dragonhorn Rhinoceros. They had the gentleness of horses, the healthy and resilience of the Dragonhorn Rhinoceros, and were the standard steed for Dark Asura Hall soldiers.

Astride the unicorns, Ban Hong and the other Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners were also wearing armor. That type of armor was made from the hard hide of spirit beasts and was called “Beastskin Armor.” It was the standard outfit for normal soldiers and relatively simple to make. Its defensive capabilities were limited, and it was low quality armor.

When Qin Lie and Gao Yu saw that it wasn’t just Liang Zhong that had put on the “Hempwood Armor,” and that even Ban Hong and the others had put on “Beastskin Armor,” they knew that the people of Dark Asura Hall were preparing for a bloody battle. They also could guess that the leader of these people, Xie Jingxuan, had probably changed into the “Blackscale Armor” that Liang Zhong had spoken of.

As expected, when the Profound Nether Beast passed the unicorns, amidst the shouts of “Mister Liang” from Ban Hong and the others, Qin Lie and Gao Yu saw Xie Jingxuan at the very front of the procession.

The white robes had disappeared. Xie Jingxuan had changed into closely-fitting black martial robes, and outside the robes, was thick black armor—Blackscale Armor.

It was a kind of armor made from scales. Each scale was palm-

sized and tightly pressed to her black clothing. The black and shiny scales flashed with a cold metallic light.

The scale armor densely covered her arms, stomach, chest, and legs, mixing into one with her black clothing. It caused her to be attired completely in black, presenting a cold and authoritative presence like a black ghost.

There was also a black mask that had been forged into the appearance of a vicious ghost that was attached to the Blackscale Armor and covered her beautiful face, which caused her to appear as though she was standing in the darkness.

The demonic mask, the cold and black scale armor covering her body, the Profound Nether Beast she rode that came from the Nether Battlefield...

At this moment, Xie Jingxuan was the death god that reaped souls. She charged on her steed at the very front, deeper into the stone forests as though she would kill all she encountered.

In the past few days, the four sides had been working together to draw away the spirit beast herds that had surrounded the Soul Devouring Beast. In reality, a large portion of the spirit beasts started to move.

Yet not all spirit beasts left this area. There was still a small portion of spirit beasts that were guarding the place.

The advance of Xie Jingxuan and Dark Asura Hall disturbed many of the spirit beast horde that had stayed back. As the Profound Nether Beast howled, three Golden Haired Apes popped their heads up first, the golden hairs on their bodies standing up on end as they beat their chests and howled. The eyes of the beasts were sharp as swords as they suddenly charged at the group.

The largest Golden Haired Ape was about four meters tall, its body seemed to be carved from gold-colored metal. As it howled, golden light surrounded it, and its presence was astonishing.

A scythe almost two meters long suddenly appeared in Xie Jingxuan's hand. That scythe was even longer than she was tall, and its body was shiny and cold.

Waving the her scythe with one hand, Xie Jingxuan charged at the Golden Haired Ape, the scythe drawing an elegant curve in the air.

The crescent was dazzling.

"Crack!"

The Golden Haired Ape's stone-hard body was divided in half by the crescent light. Its organs spilled free and onto the ground, becoming two pieces of dead flesh.

That scythe was still shiny and did not have a drop of blood on it as though it never had touched the Golden Haired Ape at all.

“Hiss!”

Another beautiful crescent beam appeared in the air. The crescent flashed and then abruptly disappeared.

The two Golden Haired Apes that were charging suddenly split into pieces when the crescent disappeared, once again being dismembered.

Elegant crescents appeared in front of Xie Jingxuan as the scythe moved. One after another, bloody beast corpses fell to the ground in pieces.

The Profound Nether Beast under Xie Jingxuan continued to advance.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu looked at her waving the scythe while she used her wondrous technique to dismember the spirit beasts. Everywhere she passed, the ground was covered in pieces of flesh. Their backs felt cold and so were their hearts.

Any spirit beasts that were in front of her, regardless of whether it was rank one or two, regardless of whether it was one or several, if it raised its head, it would instantly land on the ground in pieces.

The scythe remained untouched by fresh blood, and the Blackscale Armor she wore was still as bright. She seemed to have not actually come into contact with the spirit beasts from

beginning to end.

But the spirit beasts were continuously cut up into pieces and slaughtered. Not a single one was able to even slightly hinder her advance or cause her gaze to change at all.

Xie Jingxuan was unstoppable.

Chapter 93: Novel Spirit Artifact

The scythe lightly spun, drawing elegant and beautiful crescents that brought up bloody pieces of spirit beast flesh.

The rain of blood feel down and splashed Ban Hong and the others so they were covered in blood. But at the front, Xie Jingxuan did not wait for the storm of blood to land and shot up ahead.

Her black and dense Blackscale Armor was still untouched by blood as the Profound Nether Beast under her body seemed to fly.

“Awoo!”

The high rank spirit beasts hiding in the surroundings seemed to be infuriated by her and howled loudly as they furiously charged.

At this time, all the spirit beasts that were guarding this place came out from every direction, regardless of their level.

“Sit tightly, don’t fall down!” Liang Zhong shouted, “Ban Hong, you guys be careful on the flanks, I’ll take the end!”

This Profound Nether Beast’s speed slowed and went from the front to the back. Xie Jingxuan, who was at the very front, disappeared from Qin Lie and Gao Yu’s field of view.

Long cold blades, sharp long spears, heavy silver hammers...

One after another of exquisite spirit artifacts were revealed in the hands of Ban Hong and the others. Each spirit artifact rippled with spirit energy, and glowed when they came into the open.

Following the activation of each spirit art, the spirit artifacts seemed to become alive and released a surge of energy vibrations.

Ban Hong held a snake spear that was engraved with a ringed purple pattern. The snake spear shook, and a purple spirit snake nimbly came out from the two finger thick spear tip.

The purple spirit snake was condensed from spirit energy and was lively and nimble. It could easily avoid the direction the spirit beasts were attacking from, and then burrow into the bodies of the spirit beasts from their mouths, eyes, and ears.

The mouth of a Rank Two Golden Crag Beast was wide open and a purple spirit snake charged in.

Three seconds later, that Golden Crag Beast suddenly wailed harshly, its healthy body quickly withering as its blood and flesh seemed to quickly dissolve. In a short while, it had almost shrunk in half.

“Zing zing zing!”

Ban Hong’s left hand rhythmically moved the snake spear as

circles of dark purple spirit energy followed his arm into the snake spear.

At the tip of the snake spear, purple spirit snakes flew out one after another. Each purple spirit snake seemed to have simple intelligence, and could find openings on spirit beasts, burrowing through their noses and ears into the inside of the spirit beast and quickly cause a spirit beast to die as its organs rotted.

“Are those purple spirit snakes alive?” Gao Yu noticed Ban Hong and said suddenly after observing for a while.

“The purple spirit snakes are not alive, they only have the mind consciousness that Lord Ban Hong has put in them. There is a thread of Ban Hong’s mind intent inside each purple spirit snake. By relying on the connection between the mind consciousness and his soul, he can control the movements of every purple spirit snake. So each spirit snake twists in the air and appears to be alive.

Qin Lie’s eyes were narrowed as they flashed with an odd light. He focused on feeling it as he explained for Gao Yu.

He wasn’t the same as Gao Yu.

Gao Yu was outstandingly sensitive towards dead souls and vengeful spirits.

Because his soul was different than an ordinary person’s, his mental perception was much better than Gao Yu. Thus, he was

stronger in detecting souls, consciousness and vital energies.

Gao Yu was sensitive towards dead beings, and he was sensitive towards living beings.

Because of this, he was able to feel the boundless vitality of the spirit beast horde coming near in battles with the spirit beast horde and judge which spirit beasts horde they could attack or had to avoid. This allowed him and Gao Yu to never encounter a beast horde that could threaten them.

This time, he was focusing on his perception. He could clearly feel Ban Hong's mental consciousness inside every purple spirit snake.

The purple spirit snakes that flew out of Ban Hong's snake spear were made from spirit energy and a special spirit technique. They all had a wisp of Ban Hong's mind intent, and could communicate with his soul to become easily controlled. This caused every spirit snake to be extremely vicious and dangerous.

"So that's how it is." When Gao Yu finished hearing his explanation, he also understood. "This scared me to death. I had thought that every spirit snake had their own life, and thought he had caged these spirit snake souls in the spirit artifact to release them in battle."

"Spirit energy manifesting life is a technique of the legends. Forget about you two brats, even I have never seen it before." Liang Zhong rolled his eyes. "A column of divine light is released,

connecting the heaven and earth, and bestowed life and consciousness, transforming into a new species in a short amount time... Many have heard of such a miraculous technique, yet whether or not it really exists, still needs research and confirmation."

Liang Zhong's brow creased as he said, "As least, on our Scarlet Tide Continent, no martial practitioner knows this godly technique."

"Spirit energy manifesting life..."

Qin Lie and Gao Yu exchanged a look, their faces bright as they showed clear longing.

"Don't even dream about it!" Liang Zhong snorted coldly and then looked strangely at Qin Lie. "Kid, you haven't even reached Natal Opening Realm, but you can actually understand the spirit art that Ban Hong, who is in Manifestation Realm, is using. You also were not confounded by the appearance and directly stated the true essence... Kid, you are not simple at all."

"Am I not suppose to understand?" Qin Lie was shocked.

"You didn't see through this, but felt it with your soul. This means that your soul... is much more sensitive than other people." Liang Zhong also found it strange and muttered, "Such a weirdo, you're just a kid in the Refinement Realm so you might not even know what the soul is, but your perception is so astounding. Strange, so strange..."

“Howl!”

An enraged cry came from the Dragonhorn Rhinoceros behind the Profound Nether Beast. Two Dragonhorn Rhinoceroses charged shoulder-to-shoulder with many Rank One spirit beasts behind them.

Responsible for the rear, Liang Zhong stopped his deep pondering. He turned his head and a strange dark azure color appeared in his eyes.

Liang Zhong opened his mouth and spat out an azure crescent from under his tongue.

The crescent was just the size of a fingernail but it quickly changed after flying out. In a short ten breaths, the azure crescent became the size of a plate. The edges of the crescent were sharp like blades as it spun quickly and flew into the spirit beast horde behind them.

After a string of hair-raising, bone-breaking cracks, howls came from the beast spirit horde behind them.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu looked back and both of their expressions changed.

The plate-sized azure crescent was nimbly spinning, the edges shooting out rays of sharp azure light. The azure lights were like

spinning swords that mutilating the rampaging spirit beasts, causing them to become corpses without any life.

In these short ten seconds, the greater half of the spirit beast horde pursuing them had died.

“Return!”

Liang Zhong shouted lightly. His tongue moved as if he was going to swallow something.

The azure crescent that had rampaged for a round lightly danced as it returned. After shrinking, it was placed back under Liang Zhong’s tongue.

“It is called Azure Moon, a Profound Grade Five spirit artifact,” Liang Zhong introduced. “Spirit artifacts that are profound grade or higher can enlarge and shrink at will if there is an ‘illusory form’ spirit diagram inside. My Azure Moon wasn’t at its true form just now. Its final form is even larger than that.”

“Illusory Form spirit diagrams can enlarge and shrink spirit artifacts at will, interesting…” Qin Lie’s eyes were slightly bright.

“We’re going to enter soon, you two be careful.” Liang Zhong’s gaze gradually became serious. “It is fortunate that Xiong Ba, Tu Ze and the other kids drew away the main portion of the spirit beast horde away, otherwise, we will not have this so easily, and would have to spend more energy on going though. When we enter the

valley later, you two listen to me and do not make any unnecessary moves.”

Qin Lie and Gao Yu nodded. At this time, the two of them also noticed there weren’t any spirit beasts gathering around them.

They had heard Liang Zhong mention before that spirit beasts had the notion of territory. Low level spirit beasts would not usually enter the territories of high ranking spirit beasts. That Soul Devouring Beast was not a spirit beast of the Arctic Mountain Range, but because it was Rank Three, and was extremely close to rank four, the spirit beasts in the surroundings only dared to gather nearby to absorb the world’s spirit energy, but didn’t dare to go close to its location.

This was a spirit beast’s instinct.

Right now, no other spirit beasts appeared nearby. This meant that they entered the area the Soul Devouring Beast was active.

“If you two kids are of great help and can help us kill this Soul Devouring Beast, not only would Nebula Pavilion give great rewards, we would also not be amiss.” They were going to enter the dangerous grounds now and Liang Zhong started to raise morale. “We can give each of you a set of Beastskin Armor like what Ban Hong has. With that armor, you would not be greatly wounded if you have to face Natal Opening Realm martial practitioners.”

“And what else?” Qin Li was interested.

“If the Soul Devouring Beast is killed, there would be… good stuff smelted from its body. Those things would be very beneficial for the two of you.” Liang Zhong looked at Gao Yu. “Especially you, they should be very beneficial to the spirit art that you cultivate. If we can truly process the Soul Devouring Beast to death by fire, you will return with full pockets.”

After his words, Qin Lie and Gao Yu were excited and started to feel anticipation.

“Awoo!”

Suddenly, an earth-shaking beastial howl came from the depths of the stone forest.

When this howl came out, the stone forest seemed to quake. The stone peaks shook violently as though they were going to break and explode.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu felt their heads suddenly hurt as though an evil power had charged into their heads. They had to cover their ears with ashen faces to slightly deflect the aftershakes of the howl.

Liang Zhong’s expression changed. “It’s the Soul Devouring Beast!”

“Whoosh!”

The Profound Nether Beast under his body suddenly raced forward at full speed. Like a bolt of lightning, it passed through a narrow path and entered a strange mountain valley.

There were stone pillars erected around the mountain valley. The stone pillars on the outside were more than ten meters tall, and the deeper it goes, the shorter they become.

The shape of the entire mountain valley was like a bowl. The tallest stone pillars on the outside of the valley were the rim of the bowl, and the center of the valley was the bottom of the bowl.

At the place that was akin to the bottom of the bowl was a black stone cavern. The stone cavern seemed to be directly connected to the depths of the earth. At this moment, the mouth of the cavern was expelling a cold and dark aura. That earth-shaking howl had also come from the stone cavern.

“Such dense nature spirit energy!”

When the Profound Nether Beast stopped, Qin Lie exclaimed after inhaling in a breath. He then looked around.

In the bowl-like valley, there were pillars that increased in height as it went outwards. Qin Lie’s eyes moved and looked at one of the stone pillars, shouting, “The division of the pillars is not natural, it was done through manual movement by people who came after. There are many Spirit Gathering Boards embedded inside the stone pillars which have caused the spirit energy here to become dense.”

“You, kid, have pretty good eyes,” Liang Zhong said.

Chapter 94: Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation

Lines of ravines filled the inside of the bowl-shaped valley like spirit lines, sketching the picture of a burning fire on the valley's stone ground.

A layer of soft soil was paved on top of the ravine, and there was light peeking from underneath. The light appeared to be due to special sort of crystal.

Black clouds that were like washbasins gathered on the sky above the valley. There were hundreds of them, and they covered both the sky and the ground in heavy black.

They were all the soul fragments of the Soul Devouring Beast.

At this moment, the clumps of soul fragments of the Soul Devouring Beast were like layers of thick black clouds blocking out the light, and these black clouds were even slowly pushing downwards.

Previously, there were always Ghost Birds flying above Qin Lie and the others' heads. Liang Zhong was able to borrow the Ghost Bird's ability to grasp the movements and precise location of everyone in the stone forest.

However, there were no longer any birds above their heads, only the Soul Devouring Beasts' soul fragments.

—Not a single Ghost Bird dared to circle above the valley where the Soul Devouring Beast resided.

From time to time, the true body of the Soul Devouring Beast would roar from the cave entrance inside the valley. Each roar would shake the sky, causing even the stone pillars to shake violently and the valley to almost collapse.

The scythe vanished from Xie Jingxuan's hands, and she got off the Profound Nether Beast before running swiftly inside the valley like a black ghost.

One after another, she pressed the enhanced Spirit Gathering Boards Qin Lie had created onto the stone pillars inside the stone valley. With the addition of new Spirit Gathering Boards, the world's spirit energy that gathered inside the valley grew thicker and thicker.

Ban Hong and the rest of the Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners left their unicorns outside. They held fine-looking spirit artifacts and their expressions were solemn, ready to face battle at any time.

"Get down." Liang Zhong exclaimed softly, leading the way by getting off the Profound Nether Beast before the others and walking towards Ban Hong and his group with a heavy expression.

The lines of intersecting ravines were right in front of him. The crystals beneath the soft soil seemed to be growing even brighter.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu also slowly dismounted, and the moment they got off, the Profound Nether Beast immediately escaped outside the valley and stood together with the other Profound Nether Beast and the unicorns.

“When a Soul Devouring Beast prepares to breaks into the next rank, they often find some place dark and cold. That cave entrance is one of such spots that connects straight to the mouth of a cold underground spring. We have locked on to this cold spring mouth since half a year ago in order to deal with this Soul Devouring Beast.”

Liang Zhong frown was deep as he continued, “There were two things a Soul Devouring Beast is most afraid of. One is lightning, and the other fire. Both of these things can truly kill a Soul Devouring Beast.”

“The power of lightning is usually very hard to borrow, and it is not easy to summon it either. Therefore, we have laid down an ‘Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation’ with this cold spring’s mouth as the center. A rich amount of spirit energy would be able to draw out the maximum output of the power of the ‘Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation.’ This was why we bought a large number of Spirit Gathering Boards from Li’s Shop in hopes to increase the power of the flames as much as possible…”

“Whoo Whoo Whoo!”

While Liang Zhong was speaking, waves of dark and chilly wind

blew out from inside the cave in the valley. The cold wind spread out, and the valley slowly turned cold and icy.

A kind of suppressed, confusing, oppressing, and maddening aura quietly spread to every corner in the valley, affecting every person standing within it.

Qin Lie, Gao Yu, and even generals like Ban Hong and the others all changed their expressions slightly, a trace of evil seemingly breeding from their pupils.

“Calm your hearts!” Liang Zhong yelled coldly.

Everyone’s eyes focused, and they turned to look at him along the way. Shock leaked out of their gazes.

“A Soul Devouring Beast is breaking through. It needs to absorb the soul fragments it has released into its true body. Those soul fragments operating outside the body have eaten many martial practitioners and spirit beasts’ souls, and those souls were mixed with a great deal of hatred, fear, irritation, madness, and other negative emotions.”

Liang Zhong looked towards the sky. “Before it evolves, it needs to wash out the dregs from its soul fragments first, and only then can it absorb them. If you pay attention, you will see that there are many layers of cold and near indistinguishable ripples that can purify a portion of those negative emotions.”

Qin Lie hurriedly lifted his head and concentrated, and he found that there were layers of tide-like ripples tens of meters above his head.

When the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments, that were like black clouds, gradually descended, they would go through those cold ripples.

Meanwhile, there would be wisps of gray smoke seeping out of the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments.

Once these gray substances were detached from the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments, they would spread out to every corner of the valley. They carried an intense wave of negative emotions and could affect a martial practitioner's heart.

"The purified dregs, the jumbled memories, and all sorts of maddening emotions will only accumulate over time. They will spread to every corner of the valley and slowly erode your willpower. Liang Zhong lowered his head and frowned at Qin Lie and Gao Yu. "The two of you have the lowest realm, so you are most susceptible to the soul erosion. The first thing you need to face is your heart. Remember, you must protect your heart and not let it be affected by those negative emotions. Else, not only will you be completely useless, you will even become a burden!"

"Understood," Qin Lie and Gao Yu affirmed together.

Meanwhile, Xie Jingxuan had already placed all of the enhanced Spirit Gathering Boards one by one, and the world's spirit energy

inside the valley was growing thicker and thicker.

“I will be activating the ‘Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation.’ Get ready to protect me, and be careful of the attacks from the vile souls!” Like a flashing light, she abruptly appeared beside Liang Zhong and sat down next to a ravine near the crowd’s feet.

A wisp of fiery, crimson red light suddenly lit up from the spatial ring on her translucent finger. When the crowd watched closely, they realized that the light came from a finger-sized gem.

The gem was like a red jade. It was a red’s transparency and a red’s purity, and on the inside, it seemed to be sealing a cluster of crimson red flames.

The fiery light had come from the flame inside the gem. Initially, it was incredibly slow, but it was gradually growing bigger.

A fist-sized flame formed first inside the gem and immediately flew out afterwards. It was like a flapping fiery bird that had landed in the ravine before her eyes.

“Boom!”

The ravine abruptly burned fiercely. The blazing light soared towards the sky, and it was as if the ravine had instantly turned into an irritable fire dragon!

The long ravine that exceeded ten meters was about the width of

an arm's length. At the moment, the fire raged, and it burned until there were many crackles, immediately sweeping away the chilly feeling inside the valley .

When Qin Lie crept closer to take a look, he realized that there was actually a layer of Sunshine Stones laid beneath the ravines' soil!

This was a Profound Grade Two spirit material, one rank higher than the Fire Crystal. It was one of the essential sources of fire required to refine a Profound Grade spirit artifact.

The flames of a Sunshine Stone could melt down a great deal of extremely hard Profound Grade iron and stone into fiery juices, and the high temperature it created was incredibly scary.

Once it was ignited, if the power of fire inside a Sunshine Stone wasn't mustered and drawn out through special techniques, it could only burn for a couple of days and nights.

There was actually an entire layer of Sunshine Stones covering the over ten meter ravine. Qin Lie could not help but be shocked by such an extravagant arrangement.

"Protect me!"

Xie Jingxuan exclaimed once softly and then immediately closed her eyes, seemingly gathering her energy to activate the flames inside the gem to ignite even more Sunshine Stone inside the

ravines with this special flame.

A ravine's Sunshine Stone was ignited, and it was as if a fire dragon was formed, causing the valley's chilliness to be thoroughly suppressed.

Within the cave, the Soul Devouring Beast that was using all his energy to break to the next rank sensed the changes inside the valley. Immediately, it roared loudly, and waves of evil and cold consciousness suddenly spread upwards to the sky.

Up in the sky, the clumps of the beast's soul fragments abruptly turned irritable.

They saw about ten soul fragments that did not continue the next wave of purification. Instead, they had condensed together, transforming into a green-faced, sharp-fanged, one-eyed fiend.

All sorts of negative waves filling the valley suddenly condensed into an evil mind and consciousness and was carried by the one-eyed fiend. It aimed at the top of Xie Jingxuan's head and abruptly charged over.

The cold and evil waves of fear rushed over like an avalanche, as if it would directly kill any weaklings on its path.

From where they stood, Qin Lie and Gao Yu felt as if there were demons and monsters murderously charging at them from every direction. They felt as if they were trapped in a deep part in hell

and were about to have their flesh and blood eaten bit by bit by countless demons...

Within their minds, they found their arms, their legs, and even their hearts being ripped apart by those terrible demons in a mix of blood and flesh before they were eaten.

It was an indescribable kind of great fear, capable of demolishing a person instantly which could cause them to never wake up again for the rest of their lives.

This was the Soul Tremor unleashed by the Soul Devouring Beast, and it was specialized against souls, specialized to destroy a person's heart!

At this moment, Qin Lie could no longer see anyone around him, and the only thing he felt was that he was missing body parts and was being devoured by the demons in the terrifying nine levels of hell.

"Noo!"

He screamed hysterically, screamed with every scrap of power inside him, wanting to struggle out of this terrifying land and leave this endless purgatory.

Within the boiling blood and countless corpses, the endless demons hideously laughed and continued their all-out charge towards him...

He had become the delicious food of this evil world's demons.

"No!" He roared crazily; his consciousness was fading, the influence on him getting worse and worse.

Just when he was about to succumb completely, the trace of a cool sensation slowly appeared from within his forehead...

Amidst the endless world of evil, a beam of light abruptly appeared before his eyes, and it was as if this beam of cooling light could cleanse every evil and purify all the filth.

The sea of roiling blood and the world where countless corpses and demons roamed abruptly shattered because of the appearance of this single beam of light!

Like a shattered mirror, the terrifying scenes turned fragmented and broken, and the scenes that had sunk deep into his mind and seeped into his souls melted away like snow.

He returned to the real world.

He finally saw the people around him.

Inside the valley, many hideous and evil fiends howled from every direction, and they were all charging in his direction.

Liang Zhong and the martial practitioners from Dark Asura Hall

were swinging their fine-looking spirit artifacts about, forming many layers of beautiful shields of light, and blocked those fiends formed from the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments outside.

They were completely absorbed, and their expressions were absolutely serious.

Gao Yu was screaming beside him, his expression sometimes grim and sometimes filled with extreme terror.

—He had not yet escaped the influence of the Soul Devouring Beast's evil consciousness.

Xie Jingxuan closed her eyes and focused her energy to activate the flames inside the gem. Many flames were formed inside her gem, and once they flew out and landed on the other ravines, they ignited the Sunshine Stone, then formed a new fire dragon.

At the moment, seven fire dragons had already been formed inside the valley, and the blazing flames shone so bright that even the stone pillars beside them looked completely red.

After the originally ordinary stone pillars were baked by fire, many red colored spirit patterns began to appear on their surface. These spirit patterns resonated with the flames and turned vivid, causing the stone pillars to look like they were slowly burning up…

The Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation was slowly shaping into existence.

Chapter 95: Vile Souls!

The Soul Devouring Beast's path to break through to the next rank had only just begun, and it was already forced to stop due to Xie Jingxuan activating the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation.

As its true body angrily roared, all the soul fragments that were about to be purified instead condensed in the sky and formed many fierce and brutal vile souls.

These vile souls were a few meters tall with bodies as black as ink and carried with them all sorts of emotional waves such as violence, oppression, brutality, and so on. They continuously dove downwards from the sky, wanting to rip apart and devour these instigators.

Xie Jingxuan closed her eyes and continued to focus on igniting the rest of the Sunshine Stone inside the ravines, not affected in the slightest by the descending vile souls.

However, Liang Zhong, Ban Hong, and the rest of the Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners looked like they were facing a terrible enemy.

Their expressions were serious, and they did their best to unleash spirit energy, forming all sorts of colorful shields of light to construct a tight defensive line that prevented the vile souls from entering.

“Kill! Kill! Kill, kill, kill!”

Gao Yu’s face was twisted as he abruptly stood up with eyes filled with madness and violence. There were clusters of vengeful spirits forming atop his Ogre-faced Ring.

He suddenly attacked the person closest to him, Ban Hong.

“Whoosh!”

A gray river formed by gray vengeful spirits flew out of his two palms and flowed at Ban Hong’s chest.

Ban Hong, who was expending all his strength into the purple spirit snake to form the purple spirit light defense line, turned cold as he raised his hand and readied to smash apart the annoying gray river.

If Ban Hong, who was in the Manifestation Realm, did not bother controlling his attack’s output, even if Gao Yu didn’t die, he would instantly suffer tremendous injuries.

“Don’t! Leave it to me!”

Qin Lie exclaimed, and before Ban Hong could actually attack, he hurriedly blocked in front of him. He hastily swung out the wooden sculpture in his left hand.

Light blue electricity stabbed outwards like numerous needles, and they blocked the gray river rushing towards Ban Hong's chest. The multiple vengeful spirits screamed terribly and shrunk backwards when they touched the rampart electricity, shrinking back into the Ogre-faced Ring on Gao Yu's finger.

"Gao Yu! Wake up!"

Qin Lie took one step forward, and a fleeting bolt of blue lightning appeared from the tip of his hands, vanishing at the back of Gao Yu's neck.

Gao Yu's body shuddered as if he was electrocuted, and the blank look in his eyes gradually faded away as he began to wake up.

A few seconds later, Gao Yu woke up completely and nodded lightly towards Qin Lie. Then he sat down suddenly and focused on adjusting himself.

"These vile souls and evil spirits cannot break through our defensive line of light shields, but the evil mind and consciousness they gathered are not affected by them." Liang Zhong cut in a word at an appropriate time, "Our defense line cannot prevent their minds from entering, so the two of you better be more alert in case you became controlled by their evil consciousness and attack us instead."

The spirit artifact Liang Zhong called 'Azure Moon' hung atop the crowd's heads. It was like an azure crescent moon unleashing a misty azure light.

The azure light was like the rippling patterns of the sea. Layer after layer and circle after circle it spread, forming an azure light shield.

It was also the outermost light shield.

The azure light shield's existence was like a azure cover made out of ice, encircling everyone inside it.

The vile souls rammed into the azure light shield until the cover resounded with every collision, but they failed to break through the cover and enter.

Beneath the azure cover was the purple light shield formed by the purple spirit snake. This was the layer Ban Hong was responsible for.

And beneath those two, there were also two layers of ice blue and dark green light shields, and they were formed by the combined strength of the Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners.

At this moment, Liang Zhong, Ban Hong, and those Dark Asura Hall martial practitioners' entire bodies were glowing brightly as they continuously drew out the spirit energy inside their dantian's spirit sea, enhancing it further with their spirit artifacts before unleashing them to supply energy to those light shields non-stop.

"Our spirit energy can only play a defensive role, and it is unable

to hurt those vile souls." Liang Zhong frowned. "These vile souls formed from the soul fragments of the soul beasts cannot be affected at all by normal blades, chops, sword stabs, or other common attacks. The spirit shields also can only stop them from rapidly seeping through. Blazing fire and the berserk energy of lightning are their true bane."

While he was speaking, the frenzied sounds of the Soul Devouring Beast's true body inside the cave was growing louder and louder.

The stone pillars in the valley shook violently, and a terrifying aura gradually spread out along with the chilly air inside the valley,

"This isn't good! Its true body is coming out!" Liang Zhong's expression turned.

Qin Lie and the others also grew anxious.

"All of you, continue to defend the Miss from the vile souls' attacks with the light shields. I will deal with its main body." Liang Zhong's expression tensed up, and after he instructed the crowd, he suddenly exited the layers of light shields.

The moment he walked out, the vile souls that had covered the sky turned mad and dove towards him.

"Swish Swish Swish!"

The azure crescent moon floating above Liang Zhong's head abruptly brightened greatly. Colorful beams of cold blue lightning shot out in every direction.

All of the attacking vile souls slowed as if they had sunk into deep mud, and they screamed painfully when shone by the blue light.

Liang Zhong did not look at those vile souls. His eyes stared straight at the cave that was brimming with cold streams of air as he rapidly closed in on the entrance.

"Mister Liang watch out!" Ban Hong exclaimed.

"Aooo!"

A strange and terrible beast about five to six meters tall and tens of meters wide abruptly flew out of the cave with an angry roar.

This Soul Devouring Beast that had escaped from Nether Battlefield looked like a giant toad at first glance. Its dark brown body was covered in deep wrinkles, and in these wrinkles, were many ugly fist-sized pimples.

The pimples bulged along with its breathing body, spitting and swallowing thick streams of black.

Its three dark green eyes that were the size of a human head were

displayed in a triangle on top of its tumor-like monstrosity of a head, and each one of its eyes emanated the gazes of chilliness, gloom, and evil.

It opened its mouth and roared. Within its mouth, were rows of sharp teeth shaped like broadswords. A cold light overflowed, causing terror among the men.

The moment the toad-shaped Soul Devouring Beast came out, its three gloomy and chilly eyes turned as one to look in Xie Jingxuan's direction. With that, it proceeded to immediately charge at her.

"You're not going anywhere!"

With a cold face, Liang Zhong pointed a finger at the Azure Moon. The Azure Moon abruptly changed and actually grew bigger to about the size of a millstone.

"Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh!"

The edge of the azure spinning crescent was sharp, and while shooting beams of blade-like light, it plowed towards the Soul Devouring Beast's head.

The Soul Devouring Beast was absolutely furious. Its full body of ugly pimples suddenly bulged, and as if firing arrows, it shot out many streams of green water. Each one of these streams reeked of a terrible stench, as if they contained toxin inside them.

The Azure Moon was struck by the green water arrow and became stained with green poison. The azure light suddenly dimmed.

Liang Zhong's expression was stern. His pupils suddenly turned azure, and clusters of azure light burst out of his body, instantly merging as one with the Azure Moon's light.

The Azure Moon's light turned bright again.

Qin Lie and the others were all intently watching the battle between Liang Zhong and the Soul Devouring Beast's true body. Suddenly, they heard a rumbling noise in their eardrums, looked upwards, and only then realized that the vile souls were madly ramming into the light shields.

"Don't look at me, protect the Miss you everything to have!" Liang Zhong yelled from the other side, "Before it reabsorbs its soul fragments, the true body of a Soul Devouring Beast is very weak. I have this completely under control. All of you simply need to guard the Miss and not let Soul Devouring Beast's vile souls invade before she completely activates the formation!"

"Understood!" Ban Hong straightened. "Everyone, get your heads together and pour all your energy into the shield above your heads. Even if we die, we will not let a single vile soul slip through!"

"Yes!" The warriors of Dark Asura Hall responded in unison.

“Over there! Charge in that direction quickly! Eh? Dark Asura Hall, they are Dark Asura Hall’s men!”

“We’ve finally escaped the spirit beast horde’s pursuit!”

“Everyone, look quickly! Inside there. What is that spirit beast inside there?”

“……”

It was at this moment that there were exclamations from the periphery of the valley. The disorderly sounds of many footsteps also slowly resounded.

Qin Lie and Gao Yu were the ones who had it the easiest. When they paid attention and looked, they realized that Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo and Crimson Flame Association’s Xiong Ba’s groups had already approached quietly.

Even further back were Shattered Ice Manor’s Yan Ziqian, Nebula Pavilion’s Tu Ze , and the others. They were also approaching from another direction.

Most of these people had injuries of all severities on their bodies. Many of them were in low spirits; Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo and her people appeared gloomy, and their eyes were also overshadowed and dark.

It looked like they hadn't put the sadness of their sisters' deaths behind them yet.

When they arrived and saw the situation inside the valley, they all wore surprised expressions and subconsciously decided to come closer.

"All of you are not allowed to enter the valley!" Ban Hong immediately yelled out and stopped them. "The periphery of the valley is also the Soul Devouring Beast's domain. His presence made sure that no spirit beasts would dare to enter here. Go to where our unicorns are, that is a safe zone, and no spirit beast horde would dare approach it."

"Do not enter the valley!" On the other side, Liang Zhong did not forget to sternly instruct them even as he battled against the Soul Devouring Beast's true body.

Currently, half of the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation within the valley had been activated. Inside the bowl-shaped valley, the stone pillars at the outer edge were as red as forged iron. They even let out flames that connected to the ravines and formed a huge fiery web on top of the valley.

Not only could the existence of the huge fiery web prevent the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments from slipping out and trap its cold and evil consciousness, the web could even burn the oppressive, gloomy, and maddening evil feelings that suffused the area.

As long as Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, and the rest did not enter the valley, the intersecting huge fiery web would prevent the Soul Devouring Beast's evil consciousness from completely escaping the valley and stop it from rapidly invading their souls.

However, if they did not listen and entered the valley, then it was very likely that the negative emotions would evoke the evil thoughts inside their hearts, thus becoming affected by the Soul Devouring Beast and lose themselves just like Gao Yu before. They would turn into mad beasts and attack their own companions—this would add too many variables to the valley's situation.

"We won't come in." Na Nuo was the first to express her opinion and led her sisters to where the unicorns were. Her dark eyebrows were locked in a deep frown. Watching the many vile souls diving into the light shield built by Ban Hong and his men and watching Liang Zhong and the Soul Devouring Beast's intense battle, she muttered, "Only an idiot would go in and court death."

Tu Ze had also come over. He, Zhuo Qian, Kang Zhi, and the rest were covered in dried blood, and there was no telling if this blood were theirs or the spirit beasts he killed.

"Are you okay, Qin Lie?" he asked.

"Of course I'm fine. How about you guys?" Qin Lie asked.

To Ze broke into a bright smile, "We're all seriously injured, but no one died and we're all still part of the living. Look, we are not a single man less."

The moment he said that, Water Moon Sect's Na Nuo, Crimson Flame Association's Xiong Ba, and even Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian and their people all looked unnatural.

"Hmph!" Yan Ziqian's wore a cold facade.

"Uuu!" a girl from Water Moon Sect remembered her dead sisters and could not hold back from softly crying.

Chapter 96: Imminent Danger

In the valley, as lines of trenches were ignited into fiery dragons, the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation slowly took shape.

At this moment, all of the stone pillars in the valley's outer circle burned red-hot as they emitted lines of fire. Connecting with the firelight formed by Sunshine Stones within the trenches, they weaved into an enormous fire net and sealed off even the valley's skies.

The high temperature within the valley was almost unbearably scorching, and everyone's sweat fell like rain.

Thankfully, the location that Xie Jingxuan chose seemed to be precisely at the eye of the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation. None of those turbulent flames or weaved fire had passed through this area.

Qin Lie and the others stood there. Without any fire assaulting them from their sides, what they endured was merely the high temperature within the valley.

Above their heads, those enormous balls of malicious souls seemed to let out miserable screams after being slowly scorched within the flames, seeming to not be able to bear the scorching heat.

Attentively observing, Qin Lie found that the small flame that was sealed within the gem in Xie Jingxuan hand seemed to be a

drop of crimson colored blood.

That drop took the form of a small bird, and every time a ball of flame flew out from the instigation of her spirit energy, that drop of blood in the miniaturized shape of a bird would shrink down in size a little.

“Blood of the Vermillion Bird, it ought to be a drop of blood on a Vermillion Bird!” Gao Yu spoke all of a sudden.

Qin Lie was astounded, “You know about it?”

Gao Yu’s complexion was dark as he slightly nodded. “The moment when Vermillion Birds are born, they will already be a Rank Seven spirit beast. As they grow older and their strength increases, Vermillion Birds can still continue to make breakthroughs. The Vermillion Bird is the most terrifying fire type spirit beast. Its blood is also the most concentrated and ardent of all fire sources and is able to incite the scorching heat of any fire attributed crystals.”

Seeing that Qin Lie’s expression changed, Gao Yu continued, “A drop of a Vermillion Bird’s blood can evaporate an entire pond if it completely combusts. It is also extremely valuable and to martial practitioners who cultivate flame type spirit arts, can be said to be the most valuable treasure that can only be found with extreme luck. Such legendary spirit beasts like Vermillion Birds are very difficult to find for ordinary people and may not even exist in this continent we are on…”

“How do you know so much?” Qin Lie was astounded.

Tapping the Ogre-faced Ring on his hand, Gao Yu said in a quiet voice, “It told me. From the time I started cultivating Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record, I’ve discovered that there were some scattered memory fragments within. When I was cultivating with its help, sometimes I was able to absorb some of the fragments and obtained a lot of information that I couldn’t fathom.”

“So that’s why.” Amazed, Qin Lie looked at that ring, then turned his head around to look at Xie Jingxuan’s gem and the Vermillion Bird’s blood within it. “No wonder why she wanted to concentrate all the energy to induce the flames within the gem and use the flame inside to ignite Sunshine Stones. A spirit beast that starts out at Rank Seven from birth, a Vermillion Bird comparable to one of the Nirvana Realm, its blood… just thinking about it is dreadful.”

“Bang!”

A vile soul crashed into the purple colored light barrier. For the first time, Ban Hong’s body swayed as a hint of paleness emerged on his face.

“Lord Ban Hong!”

“Lord! Are you okay?”

“Milord!”

The other generals of Dark Asura Hall instantly noticed Ban Hong's abnormality and hastily shouted.

A touch of blood flowed out from the corner of Ban Hong's mouth. He wiped it away without trouble, shook his head, and said with a heavy voice, "I'm fine, but I can no longer protect this area on my own. I may not be able to handle the next attacks of the vile souls. All of you, get ready and prepare to take care of anything I miss."

"Yes!" everyone shouted at the same time.

Qin Lie raised his head as the expression in his eyes changed. "The vile souls are merging together again!"

At first, there were a few dozen vile souls in the air above them. Those vile souls assaulted the light barrier non-stop, continuously exhausting the strength of Liang Zhong, Ban Hong, and the others.

At this moment, of the several dozen vile souls, a portion of them stopped attacking and assembled together, as though they wanted to fuse into an even larger vile soul.

Everyone looked up to see; then, all of their expressions became solemn, realizing that the next wave of attacks would be even more terrifying.

On the other side, Liang Zhong, who appeared extremely tiny in comparison to the Soul Devouring Beast's main body, was also

controlling Azure Moon while waging a fierce battle with it.

The Soul Devouring Beast was like a small sized mountain of flesh. It was not very agile, especially after the valley's flame trenches connected and ignited; the space left for it to move about dwindled further and further.

As the inferno raged on, a layer of strange grease flowed out from the crinkles in outer layer of Soul Devouring Beast's skin. That grease was like membrane, protecting its body.

As Azure Moon spun, it brought up beams of azure colored swords of light; every single one of the swords were extremely sharp and fierce.

However, when they stabbed into the Soul Devouring Beast's body, they were blocked by that grease-like membrane; those sharp and terrifying swords actually had more than half of their power cancelled out.

After gruesomely battling for a long time, not even a wound could be seen on the Soul Devouring Beast. Instead, Liang Zhong's shoulder was doused by the green poison fluid and was already rotting away and becoming numb.

If not for the soaring flames within the valley stifling the Soul Devouring Beast, perhaps Liang Zhong would be even more miserable.

The party's situation within the valley was not very promising.

Outside of the valley in the region where the unicorn resided, the youths of Crimson Flame Association, Water Moon Sect, Nebula Pavilion, and Shattered Ice Manor gathered together, all looking at the activity within the valley in amazement.

"Young Master, that Qin Lie... seemed to have gotten acquainted with Dark Asura Hall's Department of Internal Affairs." In Shattered Ice Manor's direction, one of the martial practitioners of Shattered Ice Manor had on a cold and stern expression. "Could it be that we really aren't going to do it anymore?"

Yan Ziqian's left arm was thickly wrapped in gauze, and bloodstains even seeped through it. His resentful and malicious eyes focused onto Qin Lie. "Qin Lie must die no matter what!"

"Judging from the situation right now, it's not certain that the people of the Department of Internal Affairs can kill this heretical beast. If an unexpected problem arises, what should we do?" Feng Kai inquired as he lowered his voice. His face was also dark, for he hated Qin Lie to the bone.

"He needs to die, so we kill!" Yan Ziqian lowered his voice, "Once we discover that those from Internal Affairs can't last any longer and find a chance, we will do it in secret!"

"Young Master, should we not worry about Internal Affairs looking into this later on?" another person asked in a whisper.

“Our Shattered Ice Manor’s supporter in the shadows… has grievances with Internal Affairs anyway. If those at the top find out that we were able to spoil the Department of Internal Affairs’ mission, they perhaps will even commemorate us.” In order to calm everyone down, he spoke clearly about the internal disputes that were best to be kept secret. “The Department of Internal Affairs are First Hall Master’s people, and our backstage support, is the most powerful candidate for the next term’s First Hall Master.”

The moment these words were spoken, the eyes of Shattered Ice Manor’s martial practitioners, including Feng Kai, all brightened. As they looked at the Department of Internal Affairs again, there seemed to no longer be any expressions of reverence and dread.

“Are you guys alright?” On the other end, Tu Ze approached Na Nuo and others of the Water Moon Sect. Looking at that girl who was softly weeping, he sighed lightly and said, “I apologize, I did not intend to remind you of your loss. It was only for the brothers inside to feel at ease, sorry.”

“It’s not your problem.” Knitting her brows, Na Nuo glared at that lightly weeping girl and shouted, “Cry, cry, cry, all you know is how to cry! What use is there in crying? Will she come back if you cry? Do you see what kind of situation we’re in? You still have the energy to cry! When you return to Water Moon City alive, you can cry as much as you want. Right now, however, all of you, get it together!”

Being yelled at by her, that girl hastily stopped her weeping; she timidly stood there, not daring to speak.

“Three of our sisters were ripped to shreds by spirit beasts.” Na Nuo’s brows were deeply creased. Looking at the movements inside the valley, she spoke calmly, “Hopefully our battle with spirit beasts of the Arctic Mountain Range can die down sooner rather than later. Otherwise, our casualties will continue to increase, and there will be more companions who’ll perish.”

When they came, Na Nuo and those girls were all still in high spirits, like birds who were released from their cages.

Earlier, on the outer layer of the stone forest, they had always had the initiative, and it was always them who were killing the spirit beasts without ever incurring any casualties themselves, so they totally did not come to realize that there would come a day that they would die, too...

Now, because their friends who they had grown up with had been shredded and eaten right before their very eyes, they gained a whole new understanding regarding the battle with spirit beasts, as their outlook and views also changed greatly.

“It shouldn’t last too long, after all... the casualties of spirit beasts are also very great.” Tu Ze sighed.

“You had two from Nebula Pavilion who struck the fancy of Dark Asura Hall’s Internal Affairs. Mn, I congratulate you,” Na Nuo suddenly spoke as she looked toward Qin Lie and Gao Yu who were within the valley.

“That isn’t necessarily a good thing.” Tu Ze smiled bitterly.

Just as his words fell, on the valley's side, Ban Hong vomited blood and said as his complexion abruptly changed, "My light shield has shattered, you guys hold on! Qin Lie, Gao Yu! If you two have any means, then immediately use them right now and help milady persist for three more minutes! Just three more minutes is all we need!"

During the latter part of his speech, Ban Hong's entire body trembled as blood spilled out from both his mouth and nose.

"Bang!"

That new being congealed from more than ten vile spirits roared. It had the head of a demon and the body of a vicious dragon.

Currently, it was crazily assaulting the light shield, causing the purple light shield formed from purple spirit snakes to crumble and scatter into bits of purple light, completely losing its defensive capabilities.

Below the purple light shield, the other few layers of the barrier were also nearing collapse under its assault.

The rest of Dark Asura Hall's generals sat down cross legged at this time as light soared to the skies from their entire bodies. Several of them even had their skin burst open, with beads of blood seeping out.

Their appearance was extremely miserable.

“Qin Lie! Do you have any way to draw down heavenly lightning from the Ninth Heaven?” Liang Zhong suddenly shouted from under, “Thunder and lightning are the bane of vile souls and can damage them much more than flames! If you can incite a bolt of heavenly lightning to fall down like you did before on the stone bridge, then you can immediately injure that vile soul and stifle its ferocity!”

“Qin Lie! If you have a way, then be quick! We won’t last for too long!” Ban Hong roared.

“Spurt!” A Dark Asura Hall general suddenly sprayed out blood violently from his mouth. The vigor in his eyes quickly dissipated as he slacked down to the ground and died.

“Lord! I can’t hold on!” another screamed. As though inciting the hidden potential of his life, ice-blue light surged up like clouds from his entire body and melded into the light barrier above his head.

As the last petal of ice colored light flew out from his body, there was no longer any hint of life on him as he fell down with eyes wide open.

“Two minutes! Just two more minutes is all we need! Keep holding on, keep it up for two more minutes!” Ban Hong hysterically roared in a frantic manner. Tiny wisps of light were being assembled by him with great effort, attempting to congeal

into a purple spirit snake once again. Unfortunately, even though he exerted all his leftover strength, he still couldn't cause that spirit snake to fully form.

He was already on his last legs.

"Qin Lie! No matter if it'll work or not, you still need to at least try!" Liang Zhong exclaimed furiously.

Qin Lie abruptly jolted as he suddenly closed his eyes and immediately sat down.

He began to channel Heavenly Thunder Eradication with all his might.

Chapter 97: Giant Demon Mirage

As a wisp of his mind and consciousness floated into his dantian's spirit sea, Qin Lie suddenly became stumped. He found that the whirlpool within the spirit sea had stopped its rotation since who knows when.

Even if he channeled spirit energy and gathered his strength, that whirlpool within dantian and the spirit sea still remained motionless.

Staring blankly for a bit, he concentrated and attentively surveyed the situation and found that the spirit energy within his dantian's spirit sea seemed to have decreased by a lot...

Yet the spirit clouds lingering above the spirit sea that were originally spread thin and existed everywhere were currently distributing themselves in bundles; furthermore, each and every bundle was concentrated and thick.

It wasn't that spirit energy had decreased. Rather, it became more pure and congealed; from loose and scattered, to refined and concentrated.

As though it was completely purified once by the whirlpool.

"Rumble!"

Heavenly Thunder Eradication began to channel. The dantian's

spirit sea still showed no change, yet the rumbles of thunder came from every bone in his body.

Trace after trace of fine electric current shot out from all of his acupoints like sparks and flowed along his body's vessels lightning fast. All of them gathered toward the spirit sea's direction.

Qin Lie's heart trembled.

Ever since he started cultivating Heavenly Thunder Eradication, the thunder and lightning energy concealed within the depths of meridians, bones, and flesh had never before drawn close toward the dantian's spirit sea of their own accord!

There had always been a clear line between thunder energy and spirit energy; normally, they would not flow together.

Only when he battled with other people would some of the thunder and lightning energy discharge as his spirit energy flowed from within his spirit sea, gathering together with spirit energy and causing it to fill with the power of thunder and lightning, thereby increasing the might of his attacks.

Under normal conditions, the power of thunder definitely wouldn't spontaneously converge into his spirit sea!

Something's wrong!

Qin Lie began to get anxious. Just as he was about to focus his

mind to control them, he discovered that even his head was also rumbling nonstop. His entire body was like the origin of thunder, unceasingly quaking.

As of this moment, the thunder energy within his body had actually escaped his control. Becoming violent and turbulent, it all flooded toward the spirit sea within his dantian.

As the first batch of violent and overbearing thunder energy fell into the dantian's spirit sea, his mind suddenly jolted. With that, he instantly lost his ego, as well as all of his consciousness and thought. It was as though he was pulled into a small world within the dantian, violently surging and roiling within the dantian's spirit sea, along the direction of the thunder's flow in his body.

He lost himself. Closing his eyes, his body slightly trembled as he was incapable of controlling it.

Meanwhile, the enormous vile soul that had transformed from the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments roared within the flames, crazily crashing onto the light shield congealed by Dark Asura Hall's generals.

"Bang!"

The ice blue light barrier collapsed all of a sudden as blue light scatteredly shot out.

Instantly, two generals of Dark Asura Hall madly sprayed out

blood. Vigor dissipated within their bloodshot eyes.

“Qin Lie! Gao Yu! Is there anything you can do? If you do, then act on it already!” Ban Hong was raspily roaring, but unfortunately, his voice was incredibly quiet and hoarse.

He had already exhausted everything he had and didn’t even have the strength to shout very loudly.

On his fingertip, a miniature purple colored spirit snake was trying to solidify, yet it could not truly take form at all.

Traces of blood uncontrollably flowed out of Ban Hong’s nostrils, ears, and eyes. His expression was mournful, yet he was helpless.

At this very moment, the Soul Devouring Beast rabidly pounced onto Liang Zhong. His Azure Moon’s brilliance was gradually fading. In addition, his shoulder possessed a few wounds that were still being eaten away by the poisonous fluid.

Liang Zhong could not assist the others in any way.

Outside the valley, Crimson Flame Association’s Xiong Ba, Water Moon Sect’s Na Nuo, as well as Nebula Pavilion’s Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and others, all looked appalled and anxious, intimidated by the crisis within the valley.

They subconsciously approached the valley, wanting to find someway to help out in order to assist Liang Zhong and Dark Asura

Hall in their fight against the Soul Devouring Beast.

"All of you stop! Don't make extra trouble for us!"

Liang Zhong's body was flung away. While in midair, he was burned by a flame ray and his hair caught on fire.

He saw the imperativeness on the faces Xiong Ba, Tu Ze, Na Nuo, and the others, so he understood what they were thinking. He hastily chided them with all his strength, not allowing them to take a single step into the valley.

Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, and Tu Ze's footsteps stopped immediately upon being scolded. Their expressions became more and more anxious, and their hearts grew increasingly restless.

They understood very well that this was the battle's most critical moment. If either Liang Zhong and Xie Jingxuan fell, Dark Asura Hall's people would end up in an extremely precarious predicament.

Especially for Xie Jingxuan. Inciting the Vermillion Bird's blood with all her power, she was completely defenseless.

Wild and bloodthirsty, that vile soul had already shattered the various layers of defensive light barriers. If the vile soul managed another step and proceeded to destroy the dark green layer, it would be able to barrel toward Xie Jingxuan's head without obstruction, becoming able to heavily wound or even kill her while

she was in deep concentration.

Once Xie Jingxuan died, no one would be able to keep on increasing the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation's power, which meant that the Soul Devouring Beast wouldn't be smelted down, that they would also be unable to stop the Soul Devouring Beast's rank advancement.

The meticulously planned extermination operation would also go down the drain, and they would all immediately bear the bitter consequences of failure.

While the Soul Devouring Beast could slaughter all martial practitioners in the stone forest with viciousness of a rank four if it successfully broke through to its next rank, Icestone City, Water Moon City, and Crimson Flame City would all likely bear the painful consequences of their failure as well, resulting in an ending where all cities would become devoid of life.

"Qin Lie!"

"Qin Lie!"

Ban Hong and Gao Yu were both staring at Qin Lie and shouting as loudly as they could, hoping that Qin Lie could induce heavenly lightning to fall down this very moment, relieving the crisis of the vile soul's descension.

Unfortunately, it seemed that Qin Lie could not hear them and

was unaware of their expectations. His eyes were tightly shut, and his body unceasingly trembled.

There was no thunder rumbling in the nine heavens, and there was no lightning on Qin Lie's body either; everything seemed ordinary.

Ban Hong and Dark Asura Hall's martial practitioners gradually gave up hope and lost their faith in Qin Lie. Every one of them had dimmed expression in their eyes, as though they understood that the operation was about to fail.

"Whoosh Whoosh! Whoosh Whoosh Whoosh!"

Above everyone's heads, all of the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments gathered together and transformed into a several dozen meter tall dreadful vile soul.

This vile soul accumulated all of the soul fragments' strength, exuding an extremely foreboding pressure. After it took shape, that final dark green light barrier promptly burst apart.

Xie Jingxuan suddenly found herself in a defenseless state.

She had her eyes closed from beginning to end, but as if feeling the terrifying pressure from the air above, her eyelids also trembled for a bit.

"Milady! This subordinate is useless!" Ban Hong raspily shouted.

“Aooo!”

The enormous vile soul that condensed into one suddenly pounced down from the skies with heaven shaking viciousness and might, moving to eliminate all the nuisances in one fell swoop, which meant everyone, including Xie Jingxuan.

An eccentric fluctuation came from Xie Jingxuan’s body. Her eyelids below the ghost mask trembled even more violently as though she was trying really hard to wake up.

But it was unknown what trouble she encountered; even though she was trying hard to struggle free, she seemingly couldn’t do it.

The vile soul, as though bringing thick layers of black clouds with it, was about to descend, wishing to instantly eliminate all threats.

Ban Hong closed his eyes in despair, and all of the martial practitioners lowered their heads, not daring to look.

“Eh?”

However, at this crucial moment, Gao Yu cried out in surprise. A ripple suddenly radiated from the Ogre-faced Ring on his hand.

In the next moment, the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record that

Gao Yu painstakingly cultivated for many years, as well as his entire body's sinister and cold spirit energy, all madly flowed into the Ogre-faced Ring.

"Kekeke!"

Threads of ink-like, pitch-black, sinister energy, dispersed from his body. That ink-like energy current rose up to the sky, swaying, and slowly came together on top of Gao Yu's head, forming into a enormous and indistinct apparition.

That apparition had a mountain-like body, two large curved horns on the head, and a pair of pitch-black wings that could mask both the sky and earth.

The apparition was vague and indistinct, and its true appearance could not be made out. However, the moment it finished forming, a terrifying aura manifested, as though the apocalypse filled everything, from the heavens to the earth.

This imposing aura, it was demonic and evil to the extreme!

It was like an enormous demon from the depths of the nine hells had descended upon this land, struggling free from its infinite shackles and chains.

Both in and out of the valley, all sentient beings, as long as they possessed souls, felt their souls shuddering!

One after another, the Arctic Mountain Range's spirit beasts crawled down at the outer ranges. Their beastly bodies shook violently as though submitting onto the ground.

The legs of Tu Ze, Na Nuo, Xiong Ba and everyone else outside the valley trembled,and under that pressure of the enormous demon mirage, they couldn't even steadily stand.

Their willpower was utterly destroyed!

Inside the valley, Liang Zhong, Ban Hong, and martial practitioners of Dark Asura Hall suddenly felt their breath had become heavy, as if a mountain was pressing onto their shoulders. Their hearts quaked in fear as they all looked toward Gao Yu and that enormous demon mirage floating about Gao Yu's head, aghast and pale.

Even the enormous vile spirit formed from the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments also stopped its culling at this moment.

Compared to the enormous demon apparition above Gao Yu's head, that vile soul formed by all the soul fragments seemed to have been weakened all of a sudden, as though its ferocity was suppressed; it actually did not dare to pounce down.

The Soul Devouring Beast's main body, which made Liang Zhong more and more into a sorry figure, also stopped its hunt against him. Its three ice cold, sinister, and evil eyes all looked toward that indistinct demon apparition, and all three of them simultaneously revealed an intense expression of dread.

Just like how a low ranked creature that was suddenly looked down upon by a vicious entity at the top of the food chain would instinctively feel fear.

Soul Devouring Beast was afraid; whether it be the main body or the soul fragments, both felt anxious at the same time.

It stopped. Both its main body and the vile soul formed by the soul fragments were silently observing, not daring to act rashly.

Different from the vile soul congealed by the Soul Devouring Beast, this terrifying vicious demon apparition that flew out from Gao Yu's body wasn't in the slightest afraid of the scorching flames. It floated amidst the torrential flames, completely unaffected.

Its emergence caused all living things both inside and outside the valley to become dismayed and restless, resulting in the intense battle coming to a sudden stop.

Everyone was awed by the terrifying demon mirage that emerged above Gao Yu at this time. All gazes that looked toward him were filled with fear and anxiety.

Yet, Gao Yu, who was fixedly stared at by everyone, had an extremely weird expression.

He looked toward Qin Lie...

He could faintly feel the restlessness of this enormous demon mirage that had appeared inexplicably. He seemingly heard urging voices that traveled directly to his soul; that voice seemed to be the demon's voice coming from above his head.

"Quickly leave! Leave this place, leave this place!"

Gao Yu had never heard of each and every one of these odd syllables, yet he understood the meaning.

—That voice was anxiously urging him to leave.

Even though Gao Yu did not know what that demon mirage was afraid of at first, after he took a step toward Qin Lie, that voice suddenly became even more urgent and frightened. With that, he suddenly understood.

The cause of the sudden emergence of that demon mirage didn't seem be the vile soul above, nor was it the Soul Devouring Beast...

It came out because of Qin Lie!

—It was simply forced out by Qin Lie!

Unbeknownst to the reason nor what it felt, it just suddenly came out. It was continuously urging Gao Yu, telling him to leave, telling him to quickly depart from here!

—Keep away from Qin Lie!

“Why? Just why is it? What exactly do you have on you? What are you going to do? It made even the Soul Devouring Beast tremble and made the spirit beasts outside prostrate themselves, not daring to move. Yet why is it so afraid of you, why does it want me to leave your side?”

The bottom of Gao Yu’s heart was shouting. Each and every sound of the urging voice that directly traveled to his soul caused his head to ache, as though it was going to burst apart.

He clutched his head in pain, his expression was hideous, and his eyes stared at Qin Lie as he retreated backwards step by step.

Chapter 98: Activate

“Gao Yu’s too awesome!”

“This guy, the heck is that demon sealed inside his body?”

“Heavens, something that even the Soul Devouring Beast is afraid of? Gao Yu, just what kind of secret he fellow hiding?”

“It’s all thanks to Gao Yu, Gao Yu’s the one who turned the tide around!”

Outside the valley, the girls of Water Moon Sect and those of Crimson Flame Association were all looking in terror at the demon apparition floating above Gao Yu’s head. They were so frightened they had fallen on their butts, and their teeth chattered as they discussed about it.

Ban Hong and the remaining surviving Dark Asura Hall generals looked absolutely and pleasantly surprised at Gao Yu, and even Liang Zhong breathed a sigh of relief, looking towards Gao Yu with a praising look.

Currently, Gao Yu was without a doubt the center of attention, and everyone thought of him as a key figure.

In their eyes, it was Gao Yu’s presence that had suppressed the Soul Devouring Beast, intimidating it enough that it didn’t dare to act rashly or attempt to kill anyone.

Even Liang Zhong himself felt a sliver of gratitude towards Gao Yu—the Soul Devouring Beast had exhausted him so much that he was on the brink of collapsing.

It was because Gao Yu had let out the demon mirage that the Soul Devouring Beast's true body had stopped its crazy attacks on him and allowed him a breather.

"That Qin Lie something doesn't seem to have any use at all? Why did the people from Dark Asura Hall bring such a person over?"

"No idea. I don't think he's useful as well; he's just a burden."

"Yeah, Mister Liang had even placed great expectations on him earlier, saying that he will summon heavenly lightning from the sky or something. Unfortunately, nothing happened. How hilarious, they've all made a mistake."

"Yeah, it was a mistake. Qin Lie was expected to play an important role, but he did nothing. Instead, it was that Gao Yu who had such a terrifying card hidden!"

"Gao Yu's future is limitless! With such a vile soul sealed inside his body, his accomplishments in the future will be unimaginable. We'll have to pay attention to him from now on!"

Many people outside the valley stared at Gao Yu and poured

praises on him, and when they talked about Qin Lie, all of their faces were filled with disdain.

The girls from Water Moon Sect, including Na Nuo, were all staring bright-eyed at Gao Yu.

As for Qin Lie, he had been completely forgotten by them.

“I-I’m getting out of the valley first.”

However, Gao Yu, the person whose everyone’s hopes were riding on, while unconsciously screaming and clutching his own head, had suddenly started to stagger away with a deathly pale face, attempting to leave the valley.

The demon mirage floated above his head and followed the direction he was moving in.

The other vile soul formed from the Soul Devouring Beast’s soul fragment above their heads also retreated continuously when it saw the demon mirage moved, as if it was afraid that it would anger the other party if it blocked the other’s path.

“Where are you going?”

“Gao Yu!”

“Don’t move!”

Everyone panicked when they saw Gao Yu heading outside and quickly yelled at him. They were all trying to stop him to get him to stay inside the valley.

Gao Yu was everyone's only hope of having that even scarier demon mirage to stay inside the valley, so it would continue to intimidate the Soul Devouring Beast.

Unfortunately, Gao Yu was completely deaf to the crowd's cries. He could only hear an urgent voice that reached deep into his soul: Leave as quickly as you can! Leave Qin Lie! Get out of the valley!

Gao Yu could feel that this huge demon apparition that had suddenly appeared was formed from the memory fragments inside the Ogre-faced Ring. It did not have the slightest bad intention towards him.

He could even vaguely sense that the huge demon mirage's urgency was for his own good...

Gao Yu was originally an extremely selfish person, and he couldn't care less about Dark Asura Hall's duty or the threat of the Soul Devouring Beast.

From his point of view, as long as he could survive, no matter how many people the Soul Devouring Beast killed, it had nothing to do with him.

Therefore, after deciding for a bit, he chose to believe his own feelings and ignored the crowd's calls. With that, he droned out the frantic yells as he resolutely walked out of the valley.

The moment he left the valley, that terrifying demon apparition floating above his head suddenly shrunk back into his body and instantly disappeared.

The urgent voices that had reached into his soul suddenly disappeared. He probed around carefully, but could not detect even a trace of the giant demon.

It was as if the huge demon had expended too much energy to appear as a shadow. It was as if it could no longer keep it up and had no choice but to hibernate again.

"Crack!"

The jade inside Xie Jingxuan's hands suddenly broke apart, and that crimson droplet of Vermillion Bird Blood had also vanished into nothingness.

She opened her eyes.

"Just a bit more! It needs only a little more!"

Xie Jingxuan's gaze was dejected, and while she grit her teeth and exclaimed that in a low tone, she suddenly stood up.

Within the valley, the lines of ravines burned with blazing fire, and the crimson red stone pillars also released streams of flames that connected with the fire inside the ravines.

She had almost ignited all the fire sources with the flames she drew out of the Vermillion Bird's Blood. But at the last moment, because the vile souls broke through all of the light shields and she had to hurriedly wake up to deal with the enemy, she panicked, lost control, and failed to activate a portion of the Vermillion Bird Blood. This resulted in the remaining three Sunshine Stones inside the ravines to not be ignited by the Vermillion Bird Blood.

Because of this, the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation could not unleash its full power.

"Milady! Milady!"

"Miss!"

When she woke up, Ban Hong and Liang Zhong's expressions relaxed as they all looked excitedly at her.

Xie Jingxuan, wearing a Blackscale Armor and covering her face with a mask, shook her head slightly amidst their gazes. "It was a bit off. The Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation could not be activated in its entirety. I hope these flames will be enough."

While she was saying that, a bright light shone out of her clear

eyes.

Rows of rainbow-like light flew out of her body and sank into the stone pillars nearby.

One by one, the crimson red stone pillars suddenly experienced a powerful wave of spirit energy, and as if the valley's thick nature spirit energy had been awakened, the waves of spirit energy began to flow along with the fire stream, both enhancing the flames and causing all of the fires to burn even more fiercely.

The Soul Devouring Beast's true body and vile souls began to struggle in unison. It was as if it had felt a flame that was specifically geared to purify them which instantly locked down the entire valley.

"Uncle Zhong, take these people away from the valley!" Xie Jingxuan said coldly.

"Understood." Liang Zhong quickly acted.

Xie Jingxuan's body shuddered slightly. It was like she had expended too much energy in a short period of time and would not be able to recover for a while, but she quickly readjusted herself, carried two Dark Asura Hall generals, and quickly flew out of the valley.

The entire valley was currently raging with flames that reached up to the sky, and every corner was blazing with fire. The blazing

clumps of fire were like an enchanted boundary that had sealed even the skies, and it was so hot that it was completely unbearable.

The Soul Devouring Beast's true body and soul fragments howled in madness amidst the thick flames, and they slowly moved closer to each other.

Both Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong were moving quickly, and after grabbing the Dark Asura Hall generals, regardless of whether or not they were alive, the two transported them outside the valley.

"Qin Lie! There's still Qin Lie! Take him as well!" Tu Ze yelled loudly.

He noticed that both Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong's first priority of rescue were all Dark Asura Hall men, not leaving even the dead behind.

And Qin Lie, still sitting at the same spot with his entire body shaking like he was trapped in a nightmare, wasn't paid any attention by them and was not evacuated.

The fire inside the valley grew fiercer and fiercer. It was as if the entire valley was burning, and the blazing heat was too much, even for Tu Ze and the others who were outside the valley, so they had no choice but to retreat.

Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and Kang Zhi were all worried for Qin Lie as

they screamed again and again outside the valley. They were afraid that Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong would forget Qin Lie or leave him behind because there wasn't enough time, resulting in him to be burned to ashes by the terrific fire.

"Be quiet!"

Liang Zhong snapped once and finally grabbed both Qin Lie and the corpse of a member of Dark Asura Hall. Having done that, he headed outside the valley through a unique path and rushed out together with Xie Jingxuan.

Once they were outside of the valley, the fiery eruptions sounded out, one after another. Many fiery stone pillars had detonated, causing the power of the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation to be even more terrifying.

"Gao Yu! What is wrong with you?" Once Qin Lie was brought out, Tu Ze breathed a sigh of relief and immediately glared at Gao Yu. "If you had stayed inside the valley for a little while longer, you would have eased some of the pressure on them. What the hell are you doing?"

"Gao Yu, why did you suddenly leave the valley?" Liang Zhong also asked.

The limp Ban Hong on the ground, the Dark Asura Hall generals, the people from Water Moon Sect and Crimson Flame Association, and even Xie Jingxuan were all looking towards Gao Yu with reproach in their eyes.

Under everyone's gaze, Gao Yu's own was dark, and with a stiff expression, he abruptly walked towards another direction.

He had followed the demon mirage's words get as far away from Qin Lie as possible, so after Qin Lie had exited the valley, he chose to distance himself from Qin Lie again.

He didn't know what was hidden in Qin Lie's body, and he didn't know what would happen either, but he knew that it would be harmful to him, so that was why he left.

He ignored everyone else's doubts, suspicions, and inquires.

"That guy is such a weird dude, what the hell is his problem?"

"It's like there's poison on our bodies. What is he hiding from?"

"There is a demon hiding in his body, so his disposition is also... it is as strange as you might as expect it to be. It's better if we stay away from him."

The crowd whispered amongst themselves, and the gazes they threw in Gao Yu's direction were very odd. But they were also slightly wary of him because, all in all, none of them dared to do anything to him.

This included Liang Zhong and the others from Dark Asura Hall.

They were also a bit wary of Gao Yu; afraid that they would provoke that thing's emergence and cause undue trouble.

"That is the Demon God's shadow." Xie Jingxuan stared at Gao Yu. "The spirit art he's cultivating and the ring on his finger are both extraordinary. Luckily... luckily this is only the shadow of a Demon God, and luckily his realm is too low and cannot truly summon it. Otherwise..."

She did not continue, but fear could be seen in Liang Zhong and the Dark Asura Hall generals' eyes.

"The Demon God's shadow? What's that?" Xiong Ba scratched his head with a baffled look. "Never heard of it, but it sounds like it's pretty strong. Even the Soul Devouring Beast is afraid of it."

"Zhuo Qian, do you know anything about it?" Tu Ze could not help but ask when he saw her expression changed.

"I'm not sure. Let's check out Qin Lie's condition first." Zhuo Qian's expression was also very unnatural, as if she had heard about the Demon God's shadow before. She did not elaborate any further and instead knelt down beside Qin Lie, calling out to him softly, "Qin Lie, how are you doing? Can you hear what I'm saying? Qin Lie..."

She called out again and again, but unfortunately there was no reaction from Qin Lie at all. It seemed that he could not hear her.

Tu Ze and the others were also getting anxious as they surrounded Qin Lie and softly called out to him, hoping to wake him up from his trance.

“Miss, that Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation... can it really purify that Soul Devouring Beast to death completely? Liang Zhong’s expression returned to normal, and as he watched the continuously eruptions in the canyon he asked worriedly.

“Five of our brothers have died. If we still can’t destroy the Soul Devouring Beast, then they will have died for nothing.” Ban Hong sighed.

“I don’t know either.” Xie Jingxuan shook her head slightly. “It could have purified it to death, but the formation cannot unleash its full power now, it may not be possible.”

The way she put it made everyone anxious, and they all looked towards the valley, eyes filled with gloom.

Chapter 99: The Sky Darkens

Both the sky above and land below of the valley were covered by a great sea of fire. The heat spread out in rolling waves, and the people outside the valley began sweating through their shirts.

Everyone stared solemnly at the valley and waited in silence, hoping that the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation would be able to completely purify the Soul Devouring Beast and eliminate this threat.

Time passed by slowly.

Gradually, following a strange ‘chi chi’ sound that could be heard from inside the valley, a thick, negative aura was starting to be released and spread outside the valley.

“Not only can the Trigram Fire purify the Soul Devouring Beast, it will also purify the negative feelings.” Liang Zhong looked to the crowd and said in a serious manner, “The aura of negativity can be considered a layer of defense for the Soul Devouring Beast, and after it has been vaporized, it still needs some time to dissipate. All of you should be a bit more careful to not have evil thoughts in your hearts. This will prevent your mind from being affected.”

The crowd nodded in understanding and calmed their hearts, protecting their minds from other thoughts.

“Is Qin Lie okay?” Liang Zhong walked over and looked at Qin Lie, whose eyes were tightly closed and body was occasionally

shaking, before frowning and saying, “For him to suddenly fall into such a strange state in a situation like this, seriously…”

Although he did not state it directly, everyone knew that he was somewhat blaming Qin Lie. The Dark Asura Hall generals also softly scoffed upon hearing his words.

At a critical juncture, Qin Lie had failed to call down heavenly lightning. In fact, he had even fallen into a strange state of unconsciousness much like deep sleep, and this somewhat caused everyone to be disappointed in him.

“Luckily, Gao Yu is here,” whispered a Dark Asura Hall general before lifting his head to look at Gao Yu, who was moving further away from them. “If he hadn’t left the valley for whatever inexplicable reason, the chance of our plan succeeding would have been much higher.”

The people from Dark Asura Hall all nodded in agreement. They also all thought that Gao Yu’s odd behavior had added a complication to this trip.

Gao Yu did not bother with them and stayed far away from the crowd, wearing a dark expression.

He simply watched Qin Lie.

No one could guess his thoughts, nor could they understand why he kept staring at Qin Lie. They all assumed that Gao Yu was a

weird person and felt that he was someone difficult to socialize with.

A thin trace of negative aura quietly creeped out of the valley from amidst the boiling flames.

Those who kept their minds calm and clear of evil thoughts felt uncomfortable and irritable surrounded by these negative auras. Therefore, everyone sat down, steadied their auras, and focused their minds to fight against it.

Na Nuo, Tu Ze, and Xiong Ba all had their eyes closed as they cleansed the hostile feelings inside their hearts. They did not say a word.

However, Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and their men were still whispering to each other with cold expressions; a cruel glitter shone through their eyes from time to time.

After a while, the wicked light in the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners grew more and more, even Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai had dark expressions on their faces...

The people from Dark Asura Hall did not pay attention to those from Shattered Ice Manor. They were only looking at the burning valley, worried that the Soul Devouring Beast would not die from this.

After a little while, the one-armed Yan Qingsong suddenly let out

a harsh yell, to the crowds surprise, and suddenly made a mad rush towards the closest crimson red pillar as though he didn't care for his life.

The moment he led at the front, Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the other Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners all attacked the crimson red stone pillar as if possessed.

"Boom Boom Boom! Bang Bang Bang!"

They did not care that the flames were burning them or even about their own lives. They used everything in their power to attack the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation's stone pillars.

These crimson red stone pillars were originally chosen from the stones within the stone forest, so they weren't very sturdy to begin with. After being burned by fire, the rocks became brittle, and under the combined assault of Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the others desperate attacks, cracks began to appear on two stone pillars.

The moment the cracks appeared, the firelight that was flying out of the two stone pillars subsequently weakened.

The barrier that sealed the sky also grew much weaker, as if a crack had formed somewhere.

The Soul Devouring Beast's shrill howls abruptly grew savage, and an even stronger wisp of mind consciousness came out of the valley, firmly controlling Yan Ziqian and the rest.

And so, Yan Ziqian and the others' attacks on the the stone pillars became even more frenzied than before.

"Dammit!" Liang Zhong's expression turned as he hurriedly summoned the Azure Moon and readied it to attack Yan Ziqian and his men.

Xie Jingxuan's eyes were also brimming with shock as she looked towards the sky above the valley and noticed the blazing flames erratically shooting everywhere. She immediately knew that the concentrated purification powers of Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation had been diminished yet again.

From the Soul Devouring Beast's howls, she could detect a trace of excitement, and this made her heart sink.

"Uncle Zhong, there's no need to worry about their identities. Kill them all." She had a cold look in her eyes as she gave the order.

Even Liang Zhong, who was rushing towards Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai, looked startled upon hearing her words, and even turned his head mid-flight. "Miss, you're mean?"

"Just kill them all." Xie Jingxuan's tone was indifferent. "You already warned them to shield their minds and clear them of evil thoughts, but they did not heed your advice. They most likely had murderous intentions and thoughts of betrayal in their hearts from the very beginning. Otherwise, they would not be influenced this easily. Their hostility and murderous intent was directed at

one of us.”

After a pause, Xie Jingxuan calmly added, “It is possible that person may be you or me…”

“Miss, are you sure?” Liang Zhong frowned.

“Kill them!” Xie Jingxuan yelled coldly.

Liang Zhong gave a great shudder and then immediately stopped himself, sending only his Azure Moon flying.

Like a crescent moon it fell amidst Yan Ziqian, Feng Kai, and the other Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners. The crescent spun nimbly, blood splattered, and heads flew.

Yan Ziqian and his men were decapitated and killed in their madness, and their blood splattered against the stone pillars in front of them.

Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, Tu Ze, Zhuo Qian, and the others opened their eyes at this moment and watched the immediate execution of the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners. They all wore pale expressions, and their gazes turned unnatural.

“An opening appeared inside the valley and the Soul Devouring Beast’s evil consciousness had already taken control of Yan Ziqian and his men.” Xie Jingxuan’s voice was cool. “They had been enslaved by the Soul Devouring Beast. If alive, they would only

work against us, becoming our enemies, which would place us in an even more unfavorable position."

After a pause, she began again, "If anyone among you falls under the control of the Soul Devouring Beast, your fate will be the same as theirs."

The moment the words were said, everyone felt chilled from the bottom of their hearts. They quickly defended their minds and kept them clean, afraid that they would be affected by the negative emotions.

"Miss, can this be repaired?" Liang Zhong asked solemnly.

Xie Jingxuan shook her head and said, "Let's wait for a little longer."

"Mn." Liang Zhong nodded.

The Soul Devouring Beast's roars would occasionally come from inside the valley, and they were terrifying. After Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong listened carefully for a little while, their expressions turned uglier and uglier.

Fifteen minutes later, Xie Jingxuan suddenly said, "We have failed. Let's prepare to leave. We cannot handle this Soul Devouring Beast on our own."

"Understood." Liang Zhong's eyes shone with obvious terror as

he turned to the crowd, “It is no longer possible to stop the Soul Devouring Beast from breaking through. Everyone is to leave this stone forest immediately while it is still in the process of breaking through. Moreover, once you’ve escaped, return as quickly as possible to your respective cities and bring this news to your elders. They should evacuate every man, woman, and child inside the city!”

“Wh-what is going to happen?” Little Sparrow from Water Moon Sect asked sheepishly.

“Once the Soul Devouring Beast successfully breaks through, it will be able to devour souls who are not strong enough to resist. Because of this, it will attack the closest cities first. Icestone City, Crimson Flame City, and Water Moon City will be its first targets, so these three cities will be facing a most terrifying situation.” Liang Zhong let out a sigh. “We will return to Dark Asura Hall immediately and let the hall send out other elites to take care of this matter, but there is no guarantee we will arrive in time. The worst case would be that our men arrive, but the Soul Devouring Beast has already successfully broken through and attacked one of the three cities. The consequences of that will be…”

Listening to his explanation, everyone could imagine the terrible scene of devastation and loss of life. Their faces were all ashen.

“As we are now, there is nothing we can do to stop the Soul Devouring Beast, so the only option left is to escape, immediately. We will clear the way, so the spirit beast hordes will not be a problem. Everyone, evacuate now!” Xie Jingxuan said coldly.

While in extreme terror, everyone hurriedly prepared to leave, ready to rush out of the stone forest immediately and bring grim news to their respective cities.

Xie Jingxuan and Liang Zhong had also mounted their Profound Nether Beasts, and the duo instructed the Dark Asura Hall generals to carry everyone remaining on their unicorns.

“Let’s move Qin Lie up onto a horse first.” Zhuo Qian yelled and extended a hand to support Qin Lie’s shoulders, about to pull him up onto the horse.

“Boom Boom Boom!”

When her arms touched Qin Lie’s shoulders, from inside Qin Lie’s body, there was the sudden roar of rampant thunder, and a bolt of blazing lightning abruptly appeared on Qin Lie’s neck like an intelligent blue snake.

“Ah!” Zhuo Qian yelled in surprise.

Everyone heard her exclamation, then looked towards her and the Qin Lie beside her with incomprehensible eyes…

“Zzzt Zzt Zzzt!”

The bolts of blue lightning were like vines or intelligent snakes. They repeatedly twisted their way out of Qin Lie’s body and entangled him entirely, causing him to look incredibly eerie.

“Booom! Booooom!”

The deafening roars of frantic thunder kept coming from his body, blasting and shaking everyone’s eardrums.

The sky in this region outside the valley was originally shining with sunlight. But at this moment, it had suddenly become covered in dark clouds, and an oppressive feeling silently covered the entire area.

“The sky… the sky has darkened,” said Kang Zhi after lifting his head.

“Clap Clap Clap!”

A bolt of flashing lightning, as thick as a huge dragon, shot out of the clouds of the highest heaven as if it would tear open the sky, accompanied by thunder that sounded like it would destroy the world.

That terrifying thunder and that zigzagging dragon-like lightning shook everyone’s hearts, filling their faces with shock.

“The sun was literally blazing just now, why is there a thunderstorm all of the sudden?” Xiong Ba of Crimson Flame Association looked puzzledly towards the sky. “From the looks of it, is there going to be a huge downpour? What strange weather…”

“Booooom!”

The rampant thunder grew fiercer and fiercer, so loud that it caused every person to tremble. Streaks of terrifying lightning like pillars that connected the sky and the land.

The thick and long bolts of lightning madly danced in the sky like chains flung about by gods, intimidating everyone there!

“Miss, th-this is…” Liang Zhong lost control and called out.

He was staring straight at Qin Lie.

“Mn, he’s the one who summoned this thunderstorm. From the looks of it… it has exceeded my expectations completely.” Xie Jingxuan’s eyes were bright and shining, and as she looked deeply at Qin Lie she said suddenly, “If… If this thunderstorm can be added to the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation, then purifying the Soul Devouring Beast will not even be a challenge.”

“That’s right!” Liang Zhong grew excited as he hurriedly rushed to Qin Lie’s side and called out, “Qin Lie, can you hear what I’m saying? If it’s possible, can you draw the lightning into the valley?”

“I will go in myself.”

Incredibly, Qin Lie suddenly stood up without warning. His entire body was flashing with lightning and roaring with thunder. As he opened his eyes, it was as though countless electric snakes

swam inside them.

Amidst the crowd's disbelieving eyes, he suddenly headed towards the valley where the Soul Devouring Beast was. The sky filled with lightning and thunder grew even more maniacal and fearsome as it wondrously followed his advancing figure.

Just like a shadow.

Chapter 100: Heaven Shaking Thunder

At the visible edges of the sky, bolt after bolt of thick lightning raged like a crazed dragon, accompanied by heaven-shocking earth-shaking thunder. The sky here was like a purgatory of thunder and lightning.

Xie Jingxuan, who sat atop the Profound Nether Beast, still wore the Blackscale Armor. Originally, she had wanted to leave and report the unfavorable situation that had transpired to Dark Asura Hall so that they could dispatch other people to come over and deal with it.

However, as she watched the sky change, she motioned for the group to stop.

The Na Nuo, Xiong Ba, Tu Ze, and the rest's faces all displayed with panic as they didn't quite understand why the thunder and lightning suddenly became so violent. Moreover, they were still in a state of unrest.

By this time, Qin Lie had already begun walking towards the blazing valley, the full sky thunder and lightning following after him.

"Qin Lie! It's Qin Lie!" exclaimed Na Nuo, who was the first to recover her senses. Her delicate body slightly trembled as the dazzling light of surprise shot out from within her eyes.

Tu Ze and Xiong Ba's expressions also quivered as their line of sight, along with the line of sight of the generals of Dark Asura

Hall, all landed on Qin Lie's body, which advanced step by step into the valley.

The fiercely burning flames seemingly had little effect on Qin Lie as he unexpectedly entered the valley without issue.

The heavenly lightning above their heads began to converge above the valley from all sides. A bolt of twisting lightning which looked like a flying dragon was discharged from the sky, rapidly shooting down like a silver chain.

An earth-moving mountain-shaking roar immediately emanated out from within the valley.

"Gao Yu?" whispered Zhuo Qian as she slightly furrowed her brows, her pretty face full of uncertainty. "What's wrong?"

Everyone all looked over.

All they saw was Gao Yu's trembling body and his colorless face. His dark, ice-cold eyes were filled with fear and unrest as he backed up step by step towards the outskirts, becoming increasingly tense with every passing moment.

"There are packs of spirit beasts out there!" hurriedly and loudly reminded Tu Ze after a moment "Once you move into the midst of a spirit beast horde, it will be very hard to calmly deal with it. Stop backing up!"

Gao Yu ignored Tu Ze's reminder, still proceeding further and further away.

He could feel the deep terror from the giant demon soul within his Ogre-faced Ring...

He finally understood why the giant demon mirage that had formed earlier urged him to stay as far away from Qin Lie as possible and it wanted him to go to the outskirts of the valley earlier.

The giant demon mirage was extremely afraid of the thunder and lightning which descended from the depths of the Ninth Heaven. The heavenly thunder and wild lightning was precisely its bane, able to instantly turn it to ashes where not even the slightest trace of it would remain.

"Boooom!"

Heavenly thunder incessantly rumbled, causing Gao Yu's soul to tremble with instinctive fear.

He gradually understood that, following his years of cultivation of the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record, his soul was different from normal people's. His soul was terrified of thunder and lightning. If he was ever not cautious and struck by the heavenly lightning which descended from the sky, he would suffer severe injuries, perhaps even to the point where his soul would dissipate.

Thunder and lightning were the bane of all evil ghosts as it was able to exterminate evil...

"Now I understand." Gao Yu lowered his head, his expression weird and undecipherable. "I, who have cultivated the Nine Hell Wandering Soul Record and wield the Ogre-faced Ring, am no different from the giant demon mirage... We are both demonic, and thus we are terrified of it."

Ignoring Tu Ze and Zhuo Qian's efforts to dissuade him, Gao Yu left by himself amidst everyone's shocked gazes.

A spirit beast suddenly roared from the direction Gao Yu had left to. Everyone looked over. Tu Ze swore and was about to go and assist, but was stopped by Zhuo Qian.

"Don't go," said Zhuo Qian, shaking her head. "There are at least ten Rank Two spirit beasts out there and around three hundred Rank Ones. If we end up surrounded by them, we will have essentially no chance of surviving or breaking out. Gao Yu can form a Demon God's shadow and should have ways of protecting himself. Don't go out there seeking your death."

Tu Ze stopped, and after silently pondering for a few seconds, he slightly nodded.

"Miss?" asked Liang Zhong, requesting instructions.

Xie Jingxuan made a silent gesture as she sat high above on top of

the Profound Nether Beast, then closed her eyes.

An extremely obvious fluctuation of mind energy spilled out from her body and rippled towards the blazing valley.

Within the valley.

Qin Lie's body was completely enveloped by serene blue lightning and the sound of rumbling thunder surrounded him as he walked amidst the vast sea of flames.

He suddenly raised his head to look at the thunder and lightning raging in the sky. Then, after pondering for a moment, he shouted, "Come!"

He focused all the energy he could muster towards channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication.

The energy of thunder and lightning within his body's acupoints, bones, muscles, veins, and flesh wildly surged towards the spirit sea within his dantian, agitating his spirit sea and causing waves to billow across it as purified spirit energy mixed with thunder and lightning energy.

His body, which had been stripped of all thunder and lightning, became exposed amidst the blazing valley and began to act like a giant magnet.

—A magnet which attracted all of the thunder and lightning that

had yet to enter.

"...Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body. So the first step of forming Heavenly Thunder Sacred Body, the very first stage, actually requires one to withstand the wild and crazed tempering of thunder and lightning."

A boom echoed within Qin Lie's mind as he raised his head towards the sky, his eyes blazing.

"Booom! Boooom!"

Bolt after bolt of lightning emerged from within the depths of the clouds, amalgamating above Qin Lie's head. Like a dragon it quickly rushed down, directly striking his body which was amidst the sea of fire.

"Bzzt bzzt bzzt!"

As the lightning descended into the valley, the Soul Devouring Beast's black, mushroom shaped soul fragments started to emit dense smoke.

The moment one of the Soul Devouring Beast's soul fragments made contact with a bolt of lightning, it would immediately disperse like dissipating smoke. Unexpectedly, all the fragments disappeared within a short moment.

The Soul Devouring Beast itself felt pain penetrate the depths of

its soul as it crazily howled, startled by the heavenly lightning.

But it definitely didn't dare to approach Qin Lie.

"Bang bang bang!"

The stone pillars beside Qin Lie were all crushed to pieces by the heavenly thunder. The sky became filled with rocks flying around and flowers of fire as the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation was once again damaged.

"Th-this is all caused by that little guy?" Outside the valley, Xiong Ba looked up at the sky, his expression startled and pale. "The thunder and lightning from within the depths of the clouds can overthrow the heavens and extinguish the earth, able to cleanse the world of all evil! How can he attract such a terrifying power?"

The people of the Crimson Flame Association were all extremely frightened as they looked at the burning valley.

Within the sky, there were at least several hundred parallel bolts of lightning, all as thick as a person's waist. With a glance, it was as if there were several-hundred, long electric dragons wildly twisting above.

A heaven and earth shattering sound of thunder echoed amidst the sky, causing many of the stone pillars within this part of the stone forest to explode.

“Bang bang bang!”

In the surrounding area, mountains collapsed and the earth opened. After being struck by the thunder, the stone pillars all instantly turned to dust and were blown away.

Such terrifying and heavenly might caused everyone’s expressions to become extremely pale, as if they were about to face the coming of doomsday. It caused all of their souls to tremble in unrest.

“Is it because of Qin Lie? Holy shit. H-how can he fill the sky with thunder and lightning?” At this time, Water Moon Sect’s Little Sparrow looked towards the burning valley, her delicate body incessantly trembling as she said, “He’s too terrifying. This manner, this activity, it’s like he wants to destroy heaven and earth. It’s even several times more terrifying than the Demon God’s shadow that Gao Yu summoned earlier!”

“I had originally thought that Gao Yu was already terrifying enough. I never would have thought that this person would be even more unrealistic. Each person is truly more abnormal than the previous!” Na Nuo’s expression was slightly cold as she inwardly determined that in the future, she would absolutely not provoke Qin Lie and Gao Yu and she would try to maintain a good relationship with Nebula Pavilion. Lest the two freaks fix their gazes on her, resulting in a wicked fate for her.

“Miss, the Eight Extreme Trigram Fire Formation is about to

collapse!” exclaimed Liang Zhong, his face sinking.

Xie Jingxuan did not panic. Instead, it was the opposite as a trace of joy emerged within her eyes.

“That’s not a problem. The heavenly lightning is much more effective at killing the Soul Devouring Beast than the fire. As long as Qin Lie is near the Soul Devouring Beast, even just somewhat close, then the Soul Devouring Beast will have a very hard time escaping.

As if he had heard her words, Qin Lie, who had been standing still, suddenly began to move.

He walked towards the Soul Devouring Beast.

As he proceeded, thunder incessantly boomed around him as lightning submerged itself within his body.

His steps were unsteady as he swayed along, and he seemed to be in a somewhat difficult position because his body trembled every time he was struck by lightning or thunder.

However, his body never fell and his steps never stopped. He continued approaching the Soul Devouring Beast.

Right by him was the mouth of the cold spring which the Soul Devouring Beast lived in!

“Aooo!”

The Soul Devouring Beast, which was on the verge of breaking through to the next rank, began to clamor wildly, trying to intimidate Qin Lie so that he would retreat in the face of danger.

However, Qin Lie didn’t pay it any attention.

“Zzzt zzzt zzzt!”

Two bolts of lightning as thick as an arm suddenly descended upon the Soul Devouring Beast’s enormous, mountain-like body of flesh. The pimples on its body all began to simultaneously emit smoke, and while the fluctuations of its life force surged, it was clear that it was somewhat exhausted.

It continued to howl wildly as if it didn’t dare to leave the cold spring. It could only unleash more evil mind attacks in an attempt to control more people like Yan Ziqian and Feng Kai. Not only that, it also tried to control Qin Lie’s soul.

A wisp of ice cold consciousness, like an awl, directly lunged towards Qin Lie’s soul.

This fluctuation was condensed from the greater half of the Soul Devouring Beast’s mind and consciousness. If Qin Lie was struck by this attack, his soul would immediately collapse and perish.

As if it felt the threat, the Soul Suppressing Orb, which was hidden between Qin Lie's brows, suddenly appeared like a third eye.

"Bzzt!"

The mind energy of the Soul Devouring Beast had just arrived in front of Qin Lie when it suddenly and inexplicably dissipated.

The Soul Suppressing Orb was like a black pupil as it seemed to glowed for a moment while facing the head of the Soul Devouring Beast...

"Boom boom boom!"

Ten bolts of heavenly lightning, as if a hand were dragging them, explosively descended, all of them striking the Soul Devouring Beast's forehead.

Instantly, its head split open, revealing flesh. The lightning had fried the beast and caused pus and blood to flow out from all of the pimples on its body, resulting in a disgusting smell saturating the entire valley as the poisonous gas spread everywhere.

A toad-shaped ghost suddenly flew out from within its head, and as soon as this ghost appeared, all of the nearby soul fragments, like homing sparrows, all hurriedly flew towards it.

That was the main soul of the Soul Devouring Beast!

The jade green eyes of the toad shaped ghost were distantly glaring at Qin Lie as it tried to remember Qin Lie within the depths of its heart so that it could take revenge one day in the future.

“Not good! The Soul Devouring Beast has given up on breaking through and wants to escape through its soul!” shouted Xie Jingxuan.

The Profound Nether Beast beneath her suddenly flew out.

Like a pillar of smoke, the Profound Nether Beast brought her with it as it rushed into the intensely burning valley. Her scythe which was even longer than her body was once again within her grasp.

As the intense flames extended over the dark light atop the Blackscale Armor that she wore condensed into a layer of essence, it magically turned into a gray sheet of light which covered her.

The cover of light crackled as it helped fend off the intensely burning flames, allowing her to calmly use her energy on the Soul Devouring Beast to help Qin Lie fight against it.

“If the main soul of the Soul Devouring Beast escapes, as long as it can attach itself to another spirit body, it can recover. This kind of vicious beast from the Nether Battlefield isn’t very dependant on its flesh. As long as its soul is strong enough, it can easily find a new body. Thus, its main soul must be extinguished, otherwise there will be endless trouble!”

Xie Jingxuan shouted as the scythe within her hand was suddenly thrown out. The scythe was like a rainbow circling the world as it flew towards the Soul Devouring Beast's main soul, carrying an extremely sharp aura.

Enduring the attacks of thunder and lightning, Qin Lie's steps staggered as he continued approaching the Soul Devouring Beast.

Between his eyebrows, the Soul Suppressing Orb shrunk to the size of a grain of rice. It looked like a small mole as it turned into something which wasn't eye catching.

The Soul Suppressing Orb which now looked like a small mole was still directed towards the Soul Devouring Beast, as if it had locked onto it...

Several more bolts of thunderous lightning once again descended, striking the Soul Devouring Beast's vile soul. During this moment, all of the soul fragments which had fused with the Soul Devouring Beast's main soul all turned into smoke and dissipated.

The Soul Devouring Beast's soul quickly withered.

Its main soul seemed to be extremely anxious and panicked as it continuously struggled in an attempt to leave the valley as quickly as possible.

However, its main soul seemed to be deeply stuck in a mire. The more it struggled, the tighter it was stuck in place. There was no way for it to leave the valley.

At this time, Xie Jingxuan's scythe, like a rainbow, directly struck the Soul Devouring Beast's main soul.

Unexpectedly, the Soul Devouring Beast which had been unable to escape, upon being struck by the scythe, mysteriously disappeared all of a sudden, as if it had suddenly turned invisible.

"This..." Xie Jingxuan's pupils quivered as her expression immediately became shaken, shouting, "Come out!"

The scythe which was suspended in the sky quickly circled around and flew back towards her, passing by the raging flames.

Surprisingly, Xie Jingxuan didn't dare go over to retrieve it, instead immediately covering her ears and closing her eyes as she bitterly resisted something...

The scythe quickly contracted, becoming the size of an arm in the blink of an eye as it firmly descended into the palm of her hand. As soon as her hand touched the scythe, her movingly beautiful body suddenly stiffened.

After quite a while, her eyes opened again, and within one of her eyes, a blurry toad shaped soul which looked like the Soul Devouring Beast emerged.