

Zheng Yuandong wasn't the only one who noticed Bai Xiaochun. Everyone else was in a huge commotion, but Bai Xiaochun was simply standing there like a member of the senior generation. He couldn't have stuck out more from everyone else.

One of the elders on the balcony smiled and said, "Young Bai Xiaochun is already in the eighth level of Qi Condensation, and fought his way out of certain death at the hands of the Luo Chen Clan. He'll definitely make it into the top ten. In fact, he probably has a shot at the top five." "That's right," said another elder. "Not only does he have extraordinary skill with plants and vegetation, he also cultivates a shocking type of body refinement. I'd say he's a definite dark horse in the qualifying round today." Hearing these comments caused the faces of Li Qinghou and Zheng Yuandong to beam. Exchanging a glance, they laughed heartily. "He's different from the rest of them," Li Qinghou said. "He has much stronger convictions than his contemporaries. When I brought him here to the sect all those years ago, I asked him why he wanted to practice cultivation, and he said it's because he wants to live forever." He looked over at Bai Xiaochun with a warm gaze. He'd finally finished preparing a defensive magical item that he planned to give Bai Xiaochun after the qualifying matches were over. "Alright, enough with the praise," Zheng Yuandong said. "Although he's my Junior Brother, as Qinghou is well aware, he's stubborn and mischievous. He still needs much tempering. However, he's a pure and genuine person who doesn't seek the limelight, which is laudable." Despite the words he uttered, everyone could tell that Zheng Yuandong's eyes gleamed with anticipation. As the group on the balcony continued to exchange words, Bai Xiaochun stood there next to the statue, proud and aloof as he looked over at Lu Tianlei, and the crowd favorite that was Shangguan Tianyou. Inwardly, Bai Xiaochun was a bit apprehensive. Lu Tianlei had electricity writhing around him, which left Bai Xiaochun's scalp numb as he thought back to what it had been like to ride his sword through the thunderstorm. And then there was Shangguan Tianyou, with his incredible good fortune and a sword from ancient times. He also had a shocking energy which left Bai Xiaochun breathless. As far as he could tell, both of them were incredibly strong. But then he thought about his own status, and coughed dryly before once again plastering an approving smile onto his face. "There are plenty of Chosen to go around," he thought, "which simply goes to show how powerful the Spirit Stream Sect is. But I'm a Prestige disciple, and the Junior Brother of the sect leader. I shouldn't be comparing myself to my juniors. They are the future of the sect, and bullying them would be wrong. Yeah. Any comparisons should wait until after they're part of the Inner Sect!" Having made his decision, he continued to stand there looking around approvingly. More and more people crowded into the valley. All of the disciples who were in the eighth level of Qi Condensation were cracking their knuckles in preparation for the fighting. As for those whose cultivation bases were lower, they were naturally coming to act as the audience. Among the three mountain peaks of the south bank, there were roughly a thousand disciples in the eighth level of Qi Condensation, and all of them were present in the valley. Bai Xiaochun was familiar with some of them. However, not all were the type of people who liked crowds and excitement. Many preferred to practice their cultivation in secret, waiting for just such an occasion as this to finally show off. The countless other Outer Sect disciples who didn't qualify to participate were waiting eagerly to see how the qualifying round would turn out. Everyone was itching to find out who would make it into the top hundred, and of course, the top ten. As for who would be the top three, there didn't seem to be much suspense about that. Presumably, those spots would go to Shangguan Tianyou, Lu Tianlei, and Zhou Xinqi. Gradually, the thousand or so eighth level disciples quieted down, as did the other surrounding disciples. A sense of pressure began to fill the air, and gradually, a foreboding sense of impending violence. A stifling, suffocating feeling weighed down on everyone, and people started to get nervous.

Bai Xiaochun was shocked to find that he was also getting nervous, although he wasn't sure why. Reminding himself that he wouldn't be participating, he looked around and forced himself to relax. It was at this time that Li Qinghou's voice rang out from the balcony above. "The grand competition between the south and north banks is about to begin! "Some among you have practiced your cultivation in secret, leaving your true level of power unknown to the public. Now is your chance to shine. You should not harbor any fear that your rapid progress or unique good fortune will be the subject of avarice among members of the senior generation. Cultivation is a personal matter, and everyone has a right to their secrets. The Spirit Stream Sect has a ten thousand year history. It is no accident that we grew from a small sect all the way to our current level of glory. All of that is because of the good fortune of our disciples. Whatever good fortune you have acquired is your personal destiny! "Some of you have come to be called Chosen by others. However, that is only because of your natural talents. Talented people can be found everywhere among the defeated. Today is the day to prove yourselves. Today is the day to show whether or not you truly deserve the title which has been bestowed upon you by others. Today you can prove whether or not you truly deserve to be... Chosen!" Li Qinghou's voice was deep and filled with pride, and seemed to form a resonance with the somber pressure that filled the area. Those who listened began to pant nervously. The disciples who had various secrets to keep all looked on with shining eyes. As for Lu Tianlei and the other famous disciples, from the expressions on their faces, they clearly were itching to fight. "The top one hundred competitors in the qualifying round will be promoted to the Inner Sect. The top ten will go on to represent the south bank in the grand finale competition, which is only held once every thirty years. This time, we have a chance to make sure that our compatriots on the north bank remember who we are!" With that, Li Qinghou flicked his sleeve, causing rumbling sounds to fill the air as columns of light shot up from all three of the south banks' mountain peaks. Everything shook violently; it was as if a pair of invisible hands were ripping apart the air above the valley, causing a huge bridge to appear! It was an ancient, primitive bridge, like something which had been pulled out of primeval times. It was constructed of stone, and was covered with ancient magical symbols that shone with flickering light. The bridge was fully 300 meters wide, and so long that it couldn't be taken in with a single glance. It was so grand and majestic that compared to it, the valley they were in seemed like nothing more than a stepping stone. The next person to speak was not Li Qinghou, but rather, Xu Meixiang. "This is the Spirit Stream Bridge, a precious treasure of our sect. It has been summoned to act as your path in this trial by fire. After the ninth bell toll, all disciples in the eighth level of Qi Condensation will step onto the bridge!" Xu Meixiang stood there, beautiful and somber, her gown fluttering in the wind, her hair floating around her. She looked less like a woman and more like an immortal. "Whoever reaches the end of the bridge first will take first place. The same method will be used to determine who is in the top hundred, and the top ten!" As Xu Meixiang's voice continued to echo out in the valley, the disciples looked eagerly at the bridge up above. This format of competition was a comprehensive way to test the disciples. The rules didn't prohibit fighting; as long as no lethal attacks were made, anything was permitted. Whoever reached the end first would be the winner! Of course, there would be obstacles along the way, and even luck would play a part. The audience panted as they waited, eyes glittering, cultivation bases stirring. Bai Xiaochun stood there yawning as the bells began to toll. Once, twice, thrice.... Four tolls, five tolls, six.... The sound of the bells struck the minds of the disciples, causing their hearts to pound. They began to rotate their cultivation bases faster and faster as they gathered together the energy they had built up. Soon the bells had rung seven times, and then eight.... Finally, when the ninth tolling of the bell could be heard, rumbling sounds filled the air as the cultivation bases of all of the eighth level disciples exploded out with full force. Like arrows loosed from a bow, all of the disciples shot into action! Over a thousand people flew into motion toward the ancient bridge. In the blink of an eye, everyone was on its surface, speeding along. Shangguan Tianyou was the fastest, standing on his flying sword, a green beam of light that instantly took the lead! Right behind him was Lu Tianlei, surrounded by crackling lightning. His energy only seemed to grow, and his speed was incredible as he attempted to close the gap between himself and Shangguan Tianyou, eyes bloodshot, howling. In third place was Zhou Xinqi, her blue flying silk rippling as she advanced at top speed. There were a few people directly behind them, none of them very well-known. Just as Li Qinghou had said, there were disciples who had concealed their true cultivation bases, waiting just for this opportunity to explode out with full force. That group almost

immediately pulled out ahead of the pack, and from the look of it, they still had energy to go faster. The surrounding audience of disciples looked on with wide eyes, hearts pounding at the scene which was unfolding in front of them. However, as wind blasted out from the sudden acceleration of the eighth level disciples, Bai Xiaochun was left standing alone in the square. After the ninth bell toll, the wind buffeted his face, and he blinked. He stood there alone, looking up at the thousand disciples racing along, sighing in admiration. "Keep it up guys!" he shouted. A moment later, he leaped into motion, landing on the bridge and running along. In the end, he decided that he might as well participate in the qualifying match, but that he wouldn't even try to get into the top ten or hundred. "I heard the north bank is full of fiends. I'd be an idiot to try to fight with them." He moved along lazily, clearly having no desire or intention of being promoted to the Inner Sect. In his view, he was already a Prestige disciple and the Junior Brother of the sect leader, and therefore had no need to become an Inner Sect disciple. Therefore, he simply enjoyed the scenery, cheering the other disciples on. He made quite a contrast with the other competitors. The audience members looked on with wide eyes and strange expressions. Meanwhile, on the balcony, veins bulged out on Li Qinghou's face as he glared at Bai Xiaochun, feeling like his head was about to explode. Xu Meixiang and the peak lord from Green Crest Peak exchanged an incredulous glance and then smiled wryly. The other elders' eyes went wide. Never could they possibly have imagined that something like this would take place in the qualifying matches. Were it any other disciple, they would quickly go teach him a lesson. But Bai Xiaochun had a special status, so all the elders could do was look over at Li Qinghou and Zheng Yuandong. Zheng Yuandong felt a headache coming on from the embarrassing loss of face.... Clearing his throat, he glanced over at Elder Zhou. "Elder Zhou, whatever happens next, I'll pretend I didn't see. You know, that phoenix of yours really suffered a lot." Elder Zhou instantly understood. Face darkening, he flew up into the air toward Bai Xiaochun. "Bai Xiaochun," he roared, "nobody can save you today! Once I get my hands on you, I'll make sure you understand exactly how my phoenix suffered!!" With that, he shot toward the bridge like a bird of prey.